DELILAH OF HARLEM

BY RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

AUTHOR OF 'MY OFFICIAL WIFE.'

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A STORY OF THE NEW YORK CITY OF TO-DAY

BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE

AUTHOR OF

"MY OFFICIAL WIFE"
"THE LITTLE LADY OF LAGUNITAS"
"PRINCE SCHAMYL'S WOOING"
"THE MASKED VENUS"
"THE PASSING SHOW" (STORIES)
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DELILAH OF HARLEM.
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DELILAH OF HARLEM.

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BOOK I.

THE SPIDER'S PARLOR.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. SELINA FRANCIS' RECEPTION. AN AMBER GODDESS!

"No, old boy! The whole thing is a bore! I am tired of New York!" cried Ralph Burnham, carefully selecting a cigar from the box of Excepcionales.

In a cosey private room of the Brunswick, two men, old college chums, were seated at a table covered with the *débris* of a bachelor dinner. It was the genial summer time of 1889. The flickering lights on the avenue lit up gay groups hurrying to café and theatre. Burnham, tall, dark, and thirty-four, was the type of your uneasy New Yorker, who chafes daily at the sameness of life in the one spot on earth dear above all others.

Walter Maxwell, critic, author, and globe trotter, (blonde and thirty-two,) leaned back in his chair, curiously eying Burnham. Slowly knocking the ash from his cigarette, he pushed Burnham a *petit verre*.

"Now, look here, Ralph! you were not cut out to play

the *blasé*. No man at Harvard was fuller of life than you. Rouse yourself, old man!" ejaculated Maxwell, caressing his blonde mustache. "Go in for something —athletics, get a yacht, drive your horses—you must pull yourself together. Now, what have you to complain of? I, poor devil, must live by my pen and wits. Still, I am happy. 'The world's mine oyster!' Yours is opened for you, and served on silver plate. When you became junior partner of Morton, Burnham & Co., your fortune was made. No firm is sounder in Wall Street; old Seth Wise's shekels in the Chemical Bank back you up; Harry Morton is an executive genius. Your duties seem to me to consist of lunching at the Lawyers' Club and trifling at the onyx counters of the Café Savarin. Do you really ever do anything?"

Burnham listlessly answered: "I go through the daily round. Of course, you know, Walter, Wise and Morton have the capital. I presume, if Harry had not married my cousin Claire, I would be merely a confidential clerk —a second edition of Mr. Abel Cram."

Ralph's voice died away in a sneer.

Maxwell gloomily pulled at his cigarette. Certain memories of a long-ago class day at fair Harvard floated back to his mind. Claire's sweet, girlish face—her wistful dark eyes proudly fixed on Burnham—came back to him. The long purse then had turned the scale—as it always does.

With affected carelessness, Maxwell returned to the charge.

"Old man, you need a deeper interest in life. Why don't you marry?" he queried.

"Marry!" almost shouted Burnham, bringing down his fist on the table. "Marriage in New York is only for millionnaires or workingmen. The one class fill the town with fools, the other with paupers. No man in my position can afford to keep a golden cage for a woman

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I polish the Earth, she brightens the sky:—
And we both declare, as half the world knows,
Though a capital couple, we WON'T WASH CLOTHES

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of his own set. Better have a millstone around one's neck. Besides," he bitterly growled, "the one woman—oh, hang it, old fellow, let's get out of here," springing to his feet, and seizing hat and stick.

"Hold on, Ralph," sharply said Maxwell, grasping him by the arm. "Don't get hipped. Now, you are too much alone. You mope and moon your time away. Get out more among people. See the passing show. Now, I warrant you don't go into the best houses and meet your old friends."

"Friends!" retorted Burnham. "I have no friends, old man, but you!" and his eyes rested lovingly on the friend of his youth. "I know a lot of fellows in business—never see them outside. As for the women, they are a bright, hard-hearted lot! Every one of them ticketed off with a price—and in the smart set, every man of us has a label bearing the figure of his bank account!

"Do you think I would be fool enough to keep a wife I would see but three times a week in the season, and only hear of her in the society slush journals, or by her unpaid bills? Never! by heaven!"

Maxwell paced the room in angry discontent. "I tell you, I am tired of the whole business! I wish to God there was a war, or a racket of some kind!"

"And you think, Ralph, your fate will not come to you!" persisted Maxwell.

"I see no outlook, old man, except the daily drudgery of the bank," moodily answered Burnham.

Maxwell donned his overcoat. "I am going to show you some queer phases of New York life, my boy—I am going to drag you away from yourself. Now, I'll meet you in half an hour at the 'Hoffman.' I am going to take you to a *soirée*. Get your dress on, and I'll show you a modern human menagerie."

"Where?" stolidly demanded Burnham.

"In Harlem, at Mrs. Selina Francis' reception to-night.

I am *ami de maison.* You will meet a lot of cranks and some very bright people. They have not a tenth of your income, but they have a hundred times the joy in life you ever will feel, unless you drop the cynic!"

"Harlem!" snorted Burnham. "Who lives in Harlem?"

"Come with me and see!" gravely rejoined Maxwell. "These people are as veritably alive as Jay Gould or the kings of the Standard Oil, although they are not worthy to be even tassels on the Inner Fringe."

"What sort are they?" timorously asked Ralph.

Maxwell laughed merrily. "Oh! artists, literary people, foreigners, and a general assortment of the human biped—male and female. Besides, old man, I want to have a chat with you in the coupé. I will release you, *parole d'honneur*, if you can't stand it."

"Well, I don't mind!" dubiously answered Burnham, who departed, murmuring, *sotto voce*, "Harlem! a reception in Harlem!" with the air of a modern Columbus.

Maxwell, having passed his *mauvais quart d'heure de Rabelais*, was first at the rendezvous. Musing as his eye strayed over the tide of politicians, sports, "Westerners," and "men about town," which ebbs and flows at the Hoffman, he vainly tried to call back all the details of Burnham's little romance wherein Claire (now his rich partner's wife) was the "bright particular star."

"It seems to me everything goes wrong," he sagely ruminated. "Now, if Burnham had Morton's money, Claire Morton might have been his happy wife and not the childless ornament of a lonely Fifth Avenue home! It's a case of 'Hoodman Blind'!"

"Ah, here we are!" he cried, as Ralph's tall form edged through the crowd.

In the coupé, many an old scene was reviewed. Maxwell's roving tastes had driven him over the world, from Corea to Egypt, from South America to Siberia, in search

of fresh pabulum for that great reading monster—the American public. Burnham would not open his heart further than to show his daily chafing under the "demnition grind."

"Tell me of yourself," sententiously demanded Burnham, as he settled himself on the cushions.

"I'm a will-o'-the-wisp," gayly replied Maxwell. "Here, there, and everywhere, with a light pocket, a good digestion, and a heart for any fate. I like this roving life. I like journalism. I like my writing. I meet those unknown men who mould the daily opinions of the masses; for the busy toilers take in their diurnal beliefs from the journals. 'Printers' ink' is the modern charm, my boy," dilated the scribe. "It brings the blush to beauty's cheek, it flatters the merchant's pride. It builds up and pulls down the statesman's house of cards. Your editor is your modern Warwick. I am a free lance under the flag of journalism. I enjoy this haphazard life. I only eschew two things."

His voice was very grave.

"And they are?" Burnham interjected.

"Love and politics!" triumphantly replied Maxwell. "I can't afford to dabble in either."

The wheels rumbling over the classic New York pavements drowned further discussion. Burnham nursed his cigar, dreaming of that hidden fate which was to come to him; of the romance which his ardent nature craved; of the utter impossibility of weaving a mystery around his humdrum life in the streets of commonplace New York.

Rousing himself, as the Jehu emerged on the asphalt of the Boulevard, he queried: "What sort of a woman is this Mrs. Selina Francis?"

Maxwell responded, with epigrammatic touches: "Middle-aged, widow, advanced ideas—gifted, gets a strange lot together—earnest, hospitable, honest—doors open to talent, and all that!"

Burnham groaned inwardly. His agonies were cut short by the arrival at the abode of the hostess.

In five minutes, the mystified Ralph was a fragment of a rapidly revolving human kaleidoscope. Drawing Maxwell aside, after his presentation to Mrs. Selina Francis, from a coign of vantage he surveyed the scene. In the centre of the parlors the hostess (tall, rawboned, and severe) received the homage of a polyglot assembly. While, with a curling lip, Burnham gazed upon the crowd, he indulged in a running commentary which greatly amused his Bohemian comrade.

"Maxwell," he whispered, "these people have no real place in society; America is crowding them out. There is no medium between Newport and a horde of the useful classes cronying over a pot of beer. This is all imitative, slavish, shabby genteel!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Maxwell. "Queerly assorted as these people are, they are real—their feelings are strong, vivid, natural. They are a jumble, but they all have dash, life, and energy. Their code and social laws are as intelligent and well grounded as the pompous edicts of the only McAllister—that high-priest of Fashion and guardian of the social Golden Rose. You must mingle with these people; you will find some remarkable characters here."

With sly humor Maxwell busied himself, and extended the social circle of his wondering friend, with many strange acquisitions: Signor Pellegrini, of the defunct Grand Opera, a tall, gloomy conspirator; Miss Alma Atherton, the buxom poetess of the heart, age forty-eight, weight two hundred; William Jenks, Yankee electrical expert, a sort of human steel trap; Professor Boompointer, the heavy geologist of the Young Ladies' Seminary at Yonkers; and Major Grape Shot Canister, of the justly celebrated New York Ninety-Seventh (never missed a parade in his life). "Great

Heavens!" murmured Burnham, "what an assortment of cranks!"

Wandering amiably under the guidance of Miss Daisy Quirk, the snappy society reporter of the "New York Strangler," Burnham threaded the double parlors and anterooms. Mrs. Selina Francis' household being arranged in telescopic fashion, it was expanded to its full extent on this festal night.

His fair conductress presented the astounded broker to Señor Castañet de Cuchillo, owner of enormous opal mines in Mexico (on the market); Mrs. Jimson Weed, a dashing widow from Chicago (antecedents hazy); and Sadie Trapbouncer, the sprightly soubrette, patentee of the Great American Labyrinthine Can-can, (not in tights,) but looking very demure and harmless.

From a safe distance, Maxwell, (a genial Mephisto,) watched with glee Burnham's onward and upward career in Harlem's "best circles."

For, sooth to say, the young broker was at heart a "proper man," and lent himself to the fast-rising jollity of the evening. Sundry music-stands, an open piano, and a suspicious dwarfed case or two, resembling baby coffins, but in reality containing violins and guitars, hinted of an impending musical deluge. In the perspective, a well-furnished table, guarded by severe looking Abigails, promised future refreshment for the "inner man and internal woman."

The final introductions of the evening ceased with Imogen Bryan, the young genius from Colorado, a wild-eyed recitationist; Tom Powers, the urbane professional base-ball referee; Mr. Cash Books, the gentlemanly financier from Macy's; Watson Squires, the unappreciated dramatist; and Count Irkutsk, the escaped Russian patriot and ex-Nihilist. "Great Scott! what hair!" ejaculated Ralph, as the Count waved his mane in friendly salutation.

Escaping gracefully from his fair guide, Burnham, in amused weariness, sought Maxwell, who was bending over a jolly-looking little woman and softly murmuring words whose fervor belied his proverbial fickleness.

Ensconced in a fortification formed by the robes of several ladies, of which charming sex great numbers ornamented the walls, Burnham listened with patience to the music, recitations, poems, and readings in which the Harlemite (male and female) does mightily delight. Too well bred to openly consult his watch, his eyes idly strayed from face to face, after he had vainly tried to lure Maxwell away from that jolly little party, by the eye telegraph.

Alas! in vain. Lower bent the enamored Maxwell's head. Softly fell the cooing accents of his deceitful voice, rosier red grew the blushes on the cheeks of the plump little woman at his side.

Suddenly, Burnham started as he explored the dim recesses wherein the ladies had taken refuge from the billows of melody, and the sonorous ranting of the *literati.*

"By Jove!" he muttered, "there's a woman out of place in this circus; I would like to see her face."

And this is what the *blasé* Ralph Burnham saw: A woman in the full bloom of life and vigor,—a daughter of the gods! tall, and with that exquisite shape which turns all heads on the idle promenade.

Simply clad in a robe of amber silk, her delicate hands lay idly crossed before her. An indescribable thrill made Burnham's pulses bound.

And yet he had not seen her face. She was gazing from the window, out into the silent night, where the great white stars were swinging grandly to the west.

Her classic head was nobly poised upon perfect shoulders. Ralph whispered to himself, "A Venus of Milo, with the arms!"

As he gazed, the Amber Lady slowly turned her head, as if Burnham's unspoken wish had reached her stranger heart.

Was it the music? For a wild strain of some old opera melody floated out through the open windows. No! She had been impassive before!

She was alone! Burnham had watched her for minutes too long for his impatient heart so strangely stirred.

Her eyes, vaguely seeking something, rested on Ralph. In their blue depths he saw the signal of Fate: "Come! I have been waiting for you!"

Steadily Burnham gazed upon a pale, fair face, perfect in its outline, and calm as the immortal goddess who smiles serenely in the Louvre.

In a moment her splendid eyes sought again the commune of the glittering stars of night.

Burnham picked his way out of the feminine fortress of his retreat, and artfully approached the triumphant Mrs. Selina Francis.

"Am I a fool?" he muttered, as he neared the hostess, who towered in the glory of her dazzling success, a social priestess of the night. The consciousness of having eclipsed all prehistoric Harlem receptions made her genial heart swell with honest pride. The climax of the evening's festivity was approaching! That bounteous supper, around whose feebly guarded outworks the soul-satisfied guests were even now beginning to swarm!

A distant tinkle of knives and clatter of forks told of feeble individual attempts to storm the culinary citadel.

When Ralph Burnham asked the favor of a presentation to the "Amber Lady," Mrs. Selina Francis broke into wreathed smiles.

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear sir!" the duenna replied, for the fame of Morton, Burnham & Co. had penetrated the wild jungles of Harlem, and Burnham, if not the lion, was one of the choicest leonine specimens

of the evening. He had that nameless air which attracts, piques, and satisfies critical womanhood!

In a moment, Ralph Burnham was bowing low before the woman whose mute call from those sapphire eyes had lured him to her side!

"Ah! I must hasten!" cried the anxious hostess, as the serried columns of hungry guests surged toward the distant tables.

"Marie," she hastily said, with affectionate familiarity, "let me present Mr. Ralph Burnham, of Morton, Burnham & Co. Mr. Burnham, my friend, Mrs. Marie Ashton," and with a flutter of her robes, Mrs. Selina Francis sailed away to the scene of the "impending conflict"!

Burnham was gazing blankly into the deep eyes steadily fixed on him, and caught himself with a start, as, with perfect composure, the lovely beauty said, "Will you not be seated, Mr. Burnham?"

That voice, low, soft, and musical, with a thrilling undertone of veiled earnestness, recalled Ralph to his senses. It was as he had expected! Her perfect form, her sweet face, intensely expressive in its expectant beauty—and a voice like the sighing of the summer breeze through the forest! A lovely wanderer!

That voice echoed from long ago! It said to him: "I have found you at last. I have called you to me. We are now side by side."

And there, under the starlight, Burnham felt that, in spite of sneer and derision, he had met his fate—in Harlem!

For a moment there was silence. Burnham caught a glimpse of the joyous Maxwell, bearing away in triumph the jolly little woman supperwards.

He disjointedly murmured, "Will you have supper, madam? Permit me!—" rising as he spoke.

The Amber Lady motioned him to his seat with her fan: "Thanks! I prefer not. It is so pleasant here."

Burnham, in the shadowed corner, could only see those wonderful blue eyes gleaming at him over the black lace of her slowly moving fan. A faint suggestion of some delicate perfume seemed to thrill every fibre of his tingling nerves!

Falling into a softly spoken dialogue, the moments glided away. Merry laughter, the sound of popping corks, and the fragmentary converse of the revellers broke in upon their *téte-à-téte*.

It was not long before Ralph Burnham knew that Marie Ashton was a stranger in New York—that she lived alone. It was easy to conclude that the "Amber Lady" was as unfettered as the man whose beating heart kept time to every musical word dropping from those curved red lips. Their splendid color was of the heart of the reddest rose.

Perfect in manner, a high-bred repose and ease marked her as a wandering Peri in this Harlem Paradise!—Man of the world, veteran *flaneur*, Burnham's persiflage could not shake her calm self-possession. His whispered thought (in his inmost soul) was, "I must make Maxwell find out all about her."

In the course of time, even Harlem suppers have an end! Burnham saw, with satisfaction, the return of Maxwell with his fair charge.

Music and dancing followed the midnight feast. Burnham unwillingly, in view of the *convenances*, sought his friend and mentor, Maxwell.

Drawing him aside, he carelessly remarked: "By the way, Walter, do you know Mrs. Ashton?"

"Ah! yes, but slightly," was Maxwell's reply, as his roving eyes followed the jolly little woman through the mazes of an interminable waltz with a hated rival. "Very nice person! Very quiet, very stylish. Widow lady from the South or West, I think. No children. I think she has money! Lives very quietly out here, near

the Park! Elegant apartment—very great friend of Mrs. Francis. Quite superior person. Goes out very little. Do you think her handsome?" concluded Maxwell.

Burnham's words slowly dropped one by one: "I consider her a very charming person!"

And in fear of self-betrayal, Ralph wandered back to the Amber Lady, still gazing, with those deep blue eyes, into the depths of the silent starlit night.

Marie Ashton welcomed him with a flashing glance, as he reseated himself at her side. In this, Burnham, with fluttering heart and bounding pulses, fancied he could read the calm utterance of a Venus Victrix: "I knew you would come back to me!"

"Mrs. Ashton," began Burnham, as he noted the hooded and cloaked fair ones beginning to disappear, "I hope I am not presumptuous if I ask the honor of paying my respects to you—at your own home?"

Marie Ashton steadily gazed over that gently fluttering fan.

"And you would like to see me again, Mr. Burnham?" she slowly said.

"Most assuredly," Ralph hastily replied.

"I live very quietly," said Marie, her voice lingering over each word, "but if you wish to see me—very much"—a pause, the filmy lace fan beating time to his heart throbs—"you may come."

Ralph's telltale eyes were filled with a strange light. Marie Ashton shivered slightly, and said: "I think, if you will take me to Mrs. Francis, I will say good-night! My carriage is waiting!"

It was only in rising that Burnham's eager eyes drank in the whole loveliness of the Amber Lady. As her arm rested on his, for the first time, Ralph felt the thrill of a newer life pulsing in his veins. Down the stairway, the Amber Lady on his arm, Burnham passed out from his

début in the hitherto unknown social deserts of Harlem.

As he made his adieu at the carriage door, the sweet face of the stranger was transfigured in the crystal starlight. Her eyes, shining steadily on him, were even kinder than the sweet low voice, which softly said : " It is, then, only *au revoir !* "

She was really gone, the lovely witch, and Ralph Burnham, standing uncovered, gazing after the carriage, dimly remembered that he had hurriedly kissed the little hand which stole out of the window, and had hastily murmured : " *Au revoir, bientot, madame !* "

The descent of many departing revellers recalling him, Burnham hastily covered himself, and muttering, " Pshaw ! I'm a fool," lit a cigar while waiting for the lingering Maxwell. That gay youth tarried above, in effusive leave-taking, from the little bouncer who was, for one eventful night, the queen of his most variable and eccentric affections.

" Let's drive down to the club and have a bit of supper," said Burnham, as the coupé bore the voyagers into Harlem back to their familiar haunts.

" I don't mind if I do," cried Maxwell, whose efforts for the comfort of his genial inamorata had driven all thoughts of self out of his head.

" What do you think of Harlem society ? " mischievously demanded the *débonnaire* journalist, after the supper had given way to the last cigar before turning in !

" I think the people at Mrs. Francis' are mostly a lot of ill-assorted freaks," replied Burnham ; " but there were some there, in very good form ! "

" I don't suppose you will ever venture up there again," slowly remarked Maxwell, eying Burnham, slyly.

" Well, you know, old fellow, I have to call on Mrs. Francis by and by ! *Visite de rigueur*, you know ! " simply replied the young broker.

"Oh! decidedly!" rejoined Maxwell. "She receives, informally, always on Sunday evenings. Not a large circle, but a few intimates, like Mrs. Ashton, for instance."

Maxwell's voice had a queer, dry inflection, which grated slightly on his hearer.

"Well! let's have a nightcap, old man," cried Burnham, and with a warm clasp of hands, in memory of the olden days, the friends separated!

Burnham slowly paced down the silent streets to his splendid apartment, and finished his cigar. He was haunted by two deep blue eyes, whose tender gaze set his pulses madly leaping! He strolled along, murmuring to himself: "It is, then, only *au revoir!*"

And as he laid his head on the pillow, his eyes closed upon a vision of that splendid, sinuous woman in amber, whose folded arms seemed to open to him. In his uneasy dreams he saw the Venus of Milo restored—sentient with throbbing life—an olden goddess born again in these latter days. Was it only a fickle fancy—a wild vision of the night—that she drew him to her royal breast and whispered: "I have waited for you long!" It was as real as all of love's madness!—Ralph Burnham dreamed wild dreams, all unwitting of the unknown future stretching dark and mysterious before him.

In a grand room, where the breezes from Central Park were wafted through silken curtains, Marie Ashton listened to the wheels of her departing carriage. Her beautiful face was bowed in her slender hands!

Ringing a silver bell, she raised her head as dusky Fanny, alert, nimble, and watchful, thrust her bronzed face through the door.

"Give me my *robe de chambre*, Fanny!" said the mistress.

When easily reclining in a deep chair, Marie Ashton kindly said: "You may go, Fanny! You are tired!"

"Honey! you looked jess' beautiful to-night!" cried the departing maid.

"Yes! Better than usual!" bitterly murmured Marie, as the silence of the room told her she was alone.

Loosening her rippling golden hair, she leaned her tired head on the velvet cushions. As her eye strayed around the room, with all its dainty embellishment of costly art and precious trifles dear to woman, she locked her shapely hands behind her head! With her gleaming arms (silvery in their whiteness) bent over her, she brokenly faltered:

"My God! To live another life! To live far away from here—to forget the past—to defy the future in one single year of peace!"

Yet back to her thoughts came the impassioned face of Ralph Burnham as he said "good-night!"—His kisses still lingered on the blue-veined hand, with its sparkling rings spanning the rosy-tipped fingers.

"He looks a man! A real man! Not a living lie!—My God!" and her face stiffened into stone, "if he should love me! and—worse than all—if I should love him! I will not drag him down with me! I will not lead him on! I will be cruel to him, that I may be kind."

She rose and poured with trembling hand a few drops from a crystal flask into a little water. Throwing herself on the luxurious bed, worthy of a queen, Marie Ashton murmured, as her eyelids closed, "If it were not for Tom Overton—yes—Tom Overton"—and she passed out into the wide world of dreams, to waken with the birds again, and hide her heart-sorrows under a smiling goddess face.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE IN THE PARK. AT THE BANK. MR. THOMAS OVERTON'S AFTERNOON CALL.

TRINITY bells struck ten long before Ralph Burnham, irreproachable as to dress, weary as to eye, crossed the portals of Morton, Burnham & Co.'s bank next morning.

In the tedium of bath and breakfast—in the constitutional of "walking down Broadway"—the financier was haunted by that refrain: "It is, then, only *au revoir!*"

Nodding to several of the employees, Burnham entered his private office. He listlessly turned over the letters on his desk.

The lines of hollow-eyed, nervous-looking clerks winked at each other and rattled their papers, as Burnham passed.

"The chief's been making a high old night of it!" whispered the youngest teller to his chum.

These callow youths were the advance guard of the great army of Wall Street bandits—mere tentacles on the limbs of that giant octopus—which is ever feeling warily around for "fresh fish!"

Cold in heart, vicious and pre-intelligent, with the fumes of cheap Sixth Avenue absinthe debauches in their brains, they addressed themselves to figuring up mountainous indebtedness against greater fools than themselves.

"That's Burnham's bell!" muttered Jenkins, the racing expert of the house, as Mr. Abel Cram, the confidential clerk, glided like a ferret through the room.

Every head was bowed—the rapid scratching of pens was as the murmuring of the leaves on Vallombrosa.

Cram the redoubtable—Cram the infallible—Cram, admitted to the counsels of the "House"! "A mighty man of war in Israel!"

The salient point of the character of Abel Cram was

his lamblike innocence—his abnegation of all the vices of men of "blood and bone." Cram might have been patented as a mere "calculating machine."

"Good-morning, Mr. Cram," carelessly remarked Burnham, as the "confidential" stood before him. "Anything new to-day?"

Cram cleared his throat. He was always clearing his throat. Passing a bony hand over that promontory which served him as a chin, he answered:

"Nothing, Mr. Burnham. The 'Co.' is with Mr. Morton. All else is as usual."

"Very good! very good!" murmured Burnham. "I shall be here till two o'clock. If any one calls later, I will be here to-morrow at ten."

Burnham carelessly scanned his letters—ignoring the waiting clerk. Cram's keen eye recognized a dainty note, with the monogram "C. M." Mr. Abel Cram had fingered the bank mail long enough to know that this elaborately ornamented stationery represented the taste of the wife of the senior partner. As he stealthily retired, Abel softly soliloquized: "I think I am about where I ought to be!"

Burnham, seizing on the one grain of wheat in a mountain of chaff, read this note:

386 Madison Avenue,
New York, *August* 20, 1889.

Dear Cousin Ralph: Both Harry and your old playmate feel that you neglect us. Have you not a moment to spare for the woman who does not forget that she was Claire Burnham, even if she does now sign herself

Claire Morton.

"Poor Claire!" softly dropped from Burnham's lips. The gates of Time rolled back and showed him again her earnest, girlish face, full of eager enthusiasm, as, leaning on his arm, she saw the Harvard colors flash to the front, in that one never-forgotten boat-race.

"Well, it's all over. Morton is a man of mark. She has all she needs in this world. I will keep away from her until she has forgotten the foolishness of past years. Yet I must make a duty call. By Jove! I'll go up this afternoon and see her. I'll send her some flowers. I'll make the little woman feel cheerful."

As he rapidly disposed of the mass of *pro forma* trash on his desk, Burnham, dreaming over his cigar, asked himself: "Would it be too soon to leave a card on Marie Ashton?"

Across the pathway of the vanished years—whence Claire Morton's sweet dark eyes shone on him—there was a sapphire flash of stranger eyes. The echoes of a velvet voice thrilled on his ear: "It is, then, only *au revoir!*"

Striding up and down his den, nervously tugging at his cigar, Morton dashed open his window, gaining a near view of a beautiful solid cream-colored brick wall.

"I'll see the 'old man,' and take a day off," he formulated. "I'll send Claire her flowers, and—and—and——"

He did not dare to openly follow out the haunting craving of his fancy. As a compromise, he mentally resolved: "I'll have a drive in the Park."

Five minutes later, Burnham, with unmoved face, entered the office where Seth Wise, the retired financial Colossus, in grave concourse, was communing with busy Morton.

Dropping into a chair, he nodded to each, and feigned an interest in the "bargain columns" of the "Herald."

Seth Wise, rosy, calm, close-shaven, and sturdy, with his cold gray eyes fixed on Morton, was dropping sage remarks on "securities," "discounts," "state of the market," and other shibboleths of the Street.

Morton, a forced composure on his impatient face, was silently drinking in the words of the Nestor of the firm.

A neat, well-set-up Gothamite was Harry Morton, irreproachable in form—his dark glittering eye dancing uneasily—his sensuous, delicate mouth twitching with the nervous excitements of the day before, and the imminent trials of the day to come. His exterior bore few signs of the never-dying fire burning beneath his bosom. Member of a dozen clubs, director of twenty companies, trustee, executor, and all-round financier, Harry Morton's life was bounded by the pale of that crowded arena in which men go down like straws before a dash of hostile financial invaders.

Just as his club memberships, his toga of titles, his wide-spread financial involvements dignified him, so his wife, his house, and all his social belongings bespoke the man of the day and hour. A swell New York financier!

Seth Wise stumped out, with a good-humored nod to Burnham, and Harry Morton turned to Ralph, his eager hands on a pile of letters, despatches, and memoranda.

"Well, Ralph," he queried, in a semi-interrogative mood.

"Harry," said Ralph, "I had a letter from Claire to-day. She gives me a send-off for not coming to the house. I think I'll go up this afternoon and see her."

"Do so! do so! my dear boy. You know what business is. I fancy she is a little lonely now and then." And Harry rattled the imposing pile of papers on his desk.

"Nothing special to-day?" perfunctorily questioned the junior partner.

"Oh, no! Nothing for you. The old thing! The market moving to every point of the compass!"

It was with a sense of grateful relief that Ralph Burnham stole out of the senior's office, his last thought being: "What a slave of routine!"

Morton, furtively watching Burnham's retreating form, silently ruminated: "Ralph's a good fellow, but has no energy—no push."

In entire oblivion of this mental condemnation by his busy senior, Mr. Ralph Burnham cheerfully assisted at a complimentary lunch party of one, dedicated to his noble self. Three o'clock found him, *en règle*, awaiting the return of his card at 386 Madison Avenue.

Banks, stocks, Abel Cram, the silent partner, and his captious chief faded from his mind as the butler told him, *sotto voce*, the basket of orchids, with his card, had preceded him by an hour.

"After all, life is worth living in New York," was Ralph's inmost thought as Claire Morton, clad in clinging robes of white, glided into the room, where he was industriously nursing an irreproachable hat and a pair of London gloves.

"So kind of you, Ralph! They are simply lovely," the fair *châtelaine* began.

Ralph's smile was almost tender as her gentle dark eyes recalled the old days. "I must ask you to pardon me, Claire," he began, in a strange, nervous manner. "Business, you know." The usual lie!

Claire Morton's steady eyes burned into his soul as she simply said: "We see so little of you. Harry is always engrossed in his affairs, and you know, Ralph, I must be lonely, when he has his director meetings and so many things to keep him out at night."

Burnham's face contracted. The old, old story! Director meetings at night!! Lassitude, weariness, *ennui*, falsehood, and dissimulation! Well, he knew the fabled excuses of the man who had borne away his boyish sweetheart in triumph. The pace is set the same, all over the world.

"I have only you to look to for friendship, Ralph. Do not be a stranger to us."

Burnham thought of that gracious woman, sitting alone in her gilded bird-cage, and his mind floated back to the old times—one never-forgotten day! Gazing furtively

at her beautiful brown eyes, he recalled Longfellow's lines :

> Once, as I told in glee
> Tales of the land and sea,
> Soft eyes did gaze on me,
> Burning yet tender ;—
> And as the white stars shine
> On the dark Norway pine,
> So on this heart of mine
> Fell their soft splendor.

And yet his inward monitor told him : " She willingly married Morton. I was forgotten. I had no chance. The younger, poorer man ! Ah ! New York ! New York ! "

In his nervous impatience to leave, Burnham promised an amendment of his social neglect.

Paltering with himself, he felt a still small voice in his inmost soul, in thrilling accents whispering : " It is, then, only *au revoir !* "

As Claire Morton stood by the *portière*, Burnham's heart smote him when, with her wistful face, she faltered : " Don't altogether forget me, Ralph. You know I have only you to lean on, if anything should happen to Harry." Was it a prayer—or a prophecy ?

As Ralph descended the steps, he felt the chill, nervous strain of the duellist who walks away from his enemy, soon to wheel on him with the pistol. He knew not that a mute white face peered after him till his form disappeared—a woman murmuring : " Ralph ! Ralph ! I have ruined your life, and not built my own Temple of Happiness."

One among the aching hearts hidden by New York's sculptured façades ! One more lonely woman, with everything at her call save heart—honor—love—devotion. One of Eve's suffering daughters ! Another sacrifice on the altar of the Moloch of New York—Fashion !

Burnham's cheerful mood returned, while he listened to the click-click of his trotters' heels speeding over the smooth drives of the Park. Friendly trees nodded to him. Dimpled dells, flashes of greensward, swaying branches, and dim vistas whispered: "Here, alone, is peace and rest! Abide with us!" Even the faces of the Milesian Park policemen were grateful to the overstrained nerves of the driver. Trifling with his heart, playing with his conscience, the moody man let the reins drop on the smoking steeds. Was it direction or indirection that drew his thoroughbreds up before the portals of the imposing pile on Central Park West where Marie Ashton sojourned?

With a careless nod, Burnham resigned the reins to an attendant. In a few moments a servant answered his card: "Mrs. Ashton at home to Mr. Burnham." As the lift bore him to the apartment of the lady, Burnham, with singular eagerness, composed a set speech of self-presentation. One brief day summed up their acquaintance. Yet already it seemed an age to his eager soul. What could he say? What should he say? Old expedients failed before this radiant Goddess of the Golden Dawn. He dared not confess that the occupations of his whole day were a mere prelude to seeing her once more—that he had acted a base part in his self-deception. It flashed over him he had only deserted his duties to see her bewitching face once more. While these thoughts surged through his excited brain, he was at the threshold. "Soft as the falling dews of night," a voice was heard: "Come in!" It was the open sesame of Paradise that day to Ralph.

And there, in that lovely bower, with her face and sunlit eyes, she stood—the lady of his dreams. With a bright smile she accepted the bunch of roses he had treasured during the solitary drive.

It was not grave surprise, it was not mad coquetry, but

a sweet, satisfied glance, as if of one who waited, which the sapphire eyes gave him as he seated himself beside her. And yet her lips were dumb.

His voice sounded harsh and dry as he struggled to say: "You knew I would come." His cheeks burned as she bent her head over the fragrant flowers in her hand. She softly said: "I hoped you would, Mr. Burnham!"

A little golden French clock ticked away noisily on the mantel, as Ralph's delighted eye surveyed the exquisite daintiness of his goddess' bower. Nothing to accentuate its loveliness could be more perfect than that calm, witching face.

Those tempting lips were parted in a smile too sweet for mocking, too sad for coquetry.

Burnham's beating heart oppressed him as he said: "Mrs. Ashton, I was driving by, and felt it my duty to pay my respects." One turn of her royal head, and the thin armor of conventionality was pierced.

Ralph arose and walked to the window. The lady of his dreams was mute. He dared not trust himself. His fretting horses below caught his eye. "Madam," he began, hurriedly, "if I might venture. My horses are perfectly reliable. Would you honor me for a short drive in the Park?"

Marie's eyes kindled. With a sweep of a magnificent arm, she indicated the difficulties of toilet. "I will wait," he almost whispered. With a faint smile, she rose, leaving him—as a vision of beauty clad in floating, clinging robes of pale blue, her return showed him an *élégante* in the panoply of Worth and Pingât.

Silently down the stair the two walked, side by side. The nodding bays dashed away, and out under leafy bowers and spreading branches the fleet feet bore them —far away from our workaday world. Marie sat silent, her dreamy eyes fixed on vacancy. Burnham's wrists

ached with the tugging of the powerful steeds. Far away, under the evening shadows, the fleet coursers dashed along.

In the freshness of the falling twilight, under the play of the breezes dancing beneath the trees, with her golden hair blown past his cheek, her bright eyes turned on him, Ralph Burnham only prayed: "May this go on forever. Forward! Onward! We should never turn back."

A little star, peeping in the eastern blue, recalled them to the world. Homeward, under the growing stars, the tired steeds plodded, dropping wearied heads to inhale the freshness of the night.

Soft and sweet as the notes of the nightingale, Marie's flute-like voice answered Burnham's eager words. It was growing dusk. In turning his head, he could only see the outlines of that queenly form. He was maddened by the faint suggestion of the perfume of her laces. Two blue eyes, rich, deep, and burning, flashed on him. His whole soul melted beneath the spell of this Circe of a day. In gracious, graceful curves, her physical contact maddened him. Beneath the calm reserve of her bearing, his ardent soul told him the fires of Hecla were blazing. Ralph, eager, and warmed to unusual life, told all his little life-history, save the one episode of that sweet, dark-haired woman who had shared the romance of his youth. Even in his delirium, Claire seemed to be a being apart—the only one—Claire of the tender eyes. Ever fenced around with the delicate memories of his chivalric youth!

To the woman by his side, Burnham dared not address a word of unmeaning flattery. For she was to him the unconquered Venus—the Goddess of Life and Light and Love. Her curved red lips parted in a meaning smile, her neck gracefully bent against the evening breeze, her royal arms folded over limbs of sculptured symmetry,

and the nameless thrill which made his heart bound—all these magic tokens bade him "worship here and wait." In silence, the attendants took the smoking steeds. Burnham stood irresolute, hat in hand, to say "good night," when her rooms were reached. Marie Ashton had thrown herself on a violet velvet divan. Beneath her fringed lashes she was calmly studying the man whose heart-throbs beat upon his brain like trip-hammers.

"Be seated, Mr. Burnham!" she said, with a smile—a command in itself. "You have given me a happy day. I thank you." Rising, with a nameless grace, she glided to the piano. "You are tired. I will sing to you."

Burnham never could forget the murmuring flood of plaintive sound, which bore on its bosom this little Spanish song:

"Yo Me Recuerdo."

Yon star which far above me gleams,
But speaks, my own, of thee!
The night winds whispering soft and low,
In murmured melody;
The thrill which my fond bosom owns,
Beloved as thou art,
Is life blood pulsing true to thee—
Within my faithful heart!

Come to my arms! They wait for thee!
May thy dear head soon rest,
In dreamless slumber, still beloved,
Upon this lonely breast!
The hour we loved; that star we've watched;
The breezes sighing low,
Bring back our love, eternal sworn—
The bliss we only know!

As the last strain died away, Burnham, with wild eagerness, seized the trembling hands of the woman, who archly turned to him with a smile on her lip. His words died

on his lip as a rough knock on the door presaged the entrance of a servant, bearing a card :

MR. THOMAS OVERTON.

The entrance of Mr. Overton, brusquely following his announcement, caused Ralph Burnham, with blazing eyes, to murmur a few words of adieu—not before a formal presentation, during which Mr. Thomas Overton's eyes were double interrogation points. Burnham carried away a vision of his graceful divinity, frozen to marble—one shapely hand pressing her breast, and the other waving him the coldest and most formal adieu. Homeward, dazed and wondering, chilled at heart, and still on fire with passion, Ralph Burnham rode, his ears still ringing with the sad refrain of that Spanish song—his weary brain demanding, in sudden jealousy :

" Who, in God's name, is Mr. Thomas Overton ? "

While Ralph Burnham tarried over his lunch on this eventful day, Mr. Thomas Overton was comfortably seated at his favorite table in the Hoffman House saloon. Dimly did Mr. Overton recognize the beauties of this palace of New York bar-rooms. Nymph and satyr, in sensuous entanglement, wooed him not. Tapestry and bric-à-brac—splendor of silver and crystal—all were lost on him. For Mr. Thomas Overton, over his cold punch *à l'absinthe*, was in a brown study. Jacketed waiters, sly racing touts, men of the day, sport and adventurer, passed him by, tacitly recognizing " one on the turf."

Overton, calmly enjoying his punch, and watching the blue smoke of a Henry Clay float away, was holding a solo council of war. For Thomas Overton had burned his ships, and was face to face with desperate fortunes. A gambler's luck !

With the inbred code of the perfect gamester, his mien was never as serene, his face as unruffled, or his smile

blander, than when he grudged the waiter the liberal *pourboire* laid beside his check.

Cleanly shaven, carefully dressed and restrained in manner, there was nothing in Tom Overton's exterior to indicate the rogue, save that "inevitable diamond" and the stern, fixed deadly eye flashing coldly above smiling lips. A little too *prononcé* in dress, a little too hawklike in manner, and yet Tom Overton, at forty-seven, was an undeniably handsome man. Three guesses would settle Mr. Overton's status in any civilized centre of the world —and in the following logical order: First—racing man; second—gambler; third—desperado.

It would have troubled Thomas, as he sat dallying with his last good cigar, to retrace the path of his involved iniquities: Drummer boy, deserter, blockade runner, bounty jumper, and spy—his war record was a "glorious" one; mate of a West India cigar smuggler, gambler on far Pacific Railroad trains, saloon-keeper at Denver, mining prospector, and, finally, a cold, clean, professional gambler.

Mr. Overton never shuddered at this extended life-history, which involved several homicides (voluntary or involuntary), but regarded himself calmly, when in luck, as a case of the survival of the fittest. When out of luck, Mr. Overton's code was condensed into one brief clause, "Not to whimper or squeal."

So far, Thomas had abstained from the exercise of the penultimate degree in his line, for stage robbery and murder he disdained. Burglary he considered the trade of fools, and bank robbery—the Omega of the ladder of intelligent crime—was denied to him, as a field, by reason of parental neglect in not giving him a careful mechanical education.

As the sonorous bells of the splendid clock rang out three, Mr. Thomas Overton pulled himself together and nonchalantly sauntered out of the Hoffman. A careless

nod here and there proved that he was yet in the swim, but the deep rings under his eyes and his calmly desperate look did not escape the hotel "bouncer," who murmured to the head porter : "Overton's 'way down on his luck !"

Selecting a less fashionable resort for a self-commune of two hours, the astute Thomas summed up his personal status in this wise :

Assets : $2.53.
A watch and chain.
Several diamonds, rings, etc.

Liabilities : Not worth mentioning.

Figures fatigued Overton.

Future : Dark and gloomy.

Too proud to resort too quickly to the vulgar means of raising money by pawning his valuables, Mr. Overton fingered once or twice quite uneasily a very neat Colt's police pistol, 38 calibre, 3½ barrel, which had been a friend in days of yore. After a slight revulsion of the nerves caused by the contact of cold steel, Mr. Overton, over another punch, growled : "Well! I've got to go and see Kate."

With careful attention to his dress, Thomas Overton waited impatiently the approaching hours of twilight. "Out on some of her society rackets, perhaps ! Never mind ! I'll win a dinner if I lose the time !" he growled, as he glared at his watch.

And so it was that Thomas Overton had the temerity to present himself in the boudoir of Marie Ashton at Central Park West, and postpone the expression of Ralph Burnham's personal enthusiasm.

When the retreating footfalls of Burnham died away, Mr. Thomas Overton, who had been decorously seated,

hat and gloves in hand, tossed these necessary articles carelessly on the piano, and roughly remarked to Marie Ashton :

"Well, Kate ! how are you ?"

Then into the listening woman's face came a flash of the fury with which the tiger guards her young. "Look out, Tom !" she hissed. "I'll have no nonsense here. What do you want ?" Her voice rang with a quiver, not of fear, but rage, hate, and semi-madness.

"The old thing, Kate. Money ! I'm dead gone broke. The races !"

Marie Ashton rose, with a devilish sneer on her pallid lips. Striding into an anteroom, she returned with a jewel box in her arms. Seating herself on the piano-stool, she placed the box on the cover of the silent instrument.

"How much ?" she demanded, in a voice as cold as the ring of steel.

"Five hundred, I guess !" was Overton's lazy reply, while he leered at her under the smoke wreaths of his half-consumed cigar.

"Then you must take the necklace," Marie cried, and sharply added, "Get out, and leave me !" She threw him a diamond chain, whose golden-linked gems flashed and sparkled in the dusky chamber.

Overton fingered the rich necklace curiously. A cunning look stole over his devilish face. "Who was that young fool who went out of here just now ?"

"I won't tell you," the woman retorted, turning on him like a tiger. "He's no man to be degraded by knowing you !"

Overton smiled. "Now, Kate !"—the angry woman, her head buried in her hands, winced at this remark—"I know that team. I know where he keeps his horses. I'll find out myself."

"For God's sake, Tom !"—the woman was on her

knees by his side—"let him alone! He's a gentleman. He's no man for you. I'll do anything. Only let him alone!"

"Will you tell me who he is?" roughly demanded Overton.

The silence of the room was broken by the sobs of a despairing woman.

"By heaven! I'll tell him a little story about Colorado." Marie sprang to her feet.

"Hold, for God's sake, Tom! I'll tell you all. He's Ralph Burnham, junior partner of Morton, Burnham & Co.—and he's a gentleman."

A broad grin relaxed Overton's features. "Sit down, you fool!" he cried. "He's not the man I want. I want to get hold of Morton. He's a game sport. He's the senior partner. You can do the trick!"

"Never!" cried Marie—striding up and down. "I will not entrap this man and see him ruined. Go after Morton yourself."

Overton calmly pocketed the diamond necklace he had been idly swinging in his fingers. Settling himself in his chair, he quietly proceeded:

"Now, Kate, be reasonable. I don't care for this young fool. That's your business. But I want to hook Morton securely. I'll give you my word I'll not harm this youngster. There's money in Morton. He is loaded down with it—and—he's a fool with women!"

"What do you wish?" brokenly murmured the despairing Delilah.

"I propose to open an account with Morton, Burnham & Co. I propose to work that banking house for all it's worth. I'll let your particular pet alone," rejoined Overton, with a cold, malicious sneer. "When you have got Morton tied to your apron-strings, then leave him to me. You can fool with the boy. We must have money—and then get out!"

Marie Ashton sprang to her feet. With blazing eyes she cried: "Tom, you know your hold on me! I'll divide all with you now—all I have; but let this thing drop. You can go away. You don't need me. I have earned my liberty. Don't push me to the wall."

Overton laughed easily as he glibly answered: "My dear Kate, you undervalue yourself. Listen to me. I have dropped about all I have. I am desperate. I may get on my feet now. But luck has run against us. You are doing the devilish quiet act, and I don't propose to fool away a whole year. I can make a big winning on this fellow Morton, but I have got to know him right. He's got the money of the firm. Now, you stand in with me! If you don't, by heaven! I'll give Mr. Ralph Burnham a little history that will wake him up. I'll not hurt him. You can get out of here safely, Kate. We'll clear out, and try Europe. Once there, you are safe. If you stand by me now, I'll let you go. I swear I will."

And Marie Ashton, shaken and broken, looking in his eyes, was fain to believe the man who lied in his heart, over the very wine-cup in which he pledged her.

When the distant church bells rang ten, Overton descended the stair, after a studied dinner, with a smile on his face. He was gayly pressing his hand on the diamond necklace. Whistling merrily as he walked a few blocks to catch a passing car, he proudly cried: "By Jove! she's a witch—the Witch of Harlem! I've got the whole game now!"

And while Ralph Burnham tossed in uneasy dreams, in which Overton's malignant face appeared, his own soul burning in mad unrest, Marie Ashton, with dry and watchful eyes, counted the shadows on the walls, and begged a God she dared not kneel to, to spare Ralph Burnham from the overhanging shadow of Tom Overton's deviltry.

CHAPTER III.

OVERTON'S ACCOUNT OPENED. IN THE POOL-ROOM. THE MOTH AND THE CANDLE.

MR. THOMAS OVERTON'S sleep that night was calm and serene. The consciousness of duty done, sweetened a balmy repose on his lonely pillow. As the agglomerated noises of New York recalled him to the daily round of honorable toil, Overton finished his morning devotions by feeling for his revolver and the diamond necklace. Strangely, they were not under the head of his bed, but beneath the mattresses in the middle. Overton playfully termed this device a "Colorado safe."

After the matutinal cocktail—a sacred ceremony—Thomas the good gazed inquiringly at the racing reports in the "Herald," and proceeded to array himself with great care for his Wall Street *début*. With rare delicacy, he abjured the diamond horseshoe pin, and left at home his glittering solitaire ring hidden. In a sober but stylish dark suit, he was very taking, and chuckled as he saw his counterfeit presentment in the glass.

"By heavens!" he murmured, "I look like a bishop." Gazing around his modest room—for he had a lair unknown to the "madding crowd"—Thomas slipped his pistol deftly in his hip-pocket, and stowed away Marie Ashton's necklace in the inner recesses of his vest. As he tucked it away, he grumblingly admitted: "She's dead game. Not a whimper! Well, I'll pull it off and give her this back, and a pair of ear-sparklers to boot."

Steadily to the Hoffman, Thomas paced down the quiet morning streets. His black-bordered handkerchief and banded hat spoke loudly of a widowed man of affairs. It was only natural that his pet barber ("tonsorial artist," per the signs) should tremblingly inquire:

"Death in the family, sir?" Thomas bowed his head gravely in silent reverie. A crushing grief!

It is a matter of history that the astute Overton had been training his mobile face for several hours to the needed solemnity of the man of business, *per se*.

A light breakfast despatched in the Hoffman café, Mr. Overton briskly walked across Madison Square, casting furtive glances to right and left—lest his roving associates, or some chance acquaintance, might see him enter the jungles of Third Avenue.

Rapidly entering a small pawn-shop, where the gilded insignia of the Medici proclaimed "Money to Loan," Thomas, without a word, passed out the necklace to Mr. Jacobs, the gentlemanly proprietor. Mr. Jacobs' dark Semitic eyes flashed with joy as he fingered the rich bauble. His blue, close-shaven face purpled with the instant effort to appraise those gems to the last cent. Around his feet, several small Jacobs, images of his own dear Rebecca, sported. That lady, loose of waist and in carpet slippers, peered in, gathering up her wandering brood, and furtively whispering, "Breakfast, Isaac."

While Overton gazed on the assortment of old clothes, bicycles, mandolins, key-bugles, decayed books, broken flutes, brass rings, antique cameos, cheap clocks, and battered plated ware—flanked by battalions of wheezy watches—making up the stock stage-set of the pawnbroker, Jacobs huskily whispered, with a suppressed groan: "How much you vant, Mr. Overton?"

"A thousand," firmly ejaculated Thomas. Hereditary heart-disease seemed to haunt Jacobs as an overhanging curse. He staggered, and clapped his hands on his greasy vest, with its enormous pendent chain and flashy diamond locket. Recovering himself, a low whistle escaped his lips:

"Vell! You vas a high-flyer!"

"Look here, Jacobs! No nonsense! I can get it in

a minute at Simpson's. Shall I go down? It's right on my way," snappishly said Thomas.

"Oh, if you vas dead set for it, I guess you vas got to get it," babbled Jacobs, as he drew out a greasy check-book and gave the surly Thomas a check for an even thousand dollars.

Dropping the necklace into the cotton-lined drawer of a cavernous safe, Jacobs handed to Overton a scrawl purporting to be a pawn ticket.

Overton, pocketing the check and ticket, turned to go. "Hold on! You now vas to stand de drinks, Mr. Overton!" Tom nodded briefly. A sop to Cerberus! They strode across the dirty avenue to the nearest "Tammany depot." There, a wild-eyed Irish youth was filling quart bottles with the day's allowance of poison, and a dilapidated African was mopping up the tessellated floor.

This little social ceremony accomplished, Overton carelessly nodded to Jacobs, and made a sudden sortie on a car.

"He blays de races awful strong. He's a grade high-flyer, dat fellow," perorated Jacobs, as he departed, his mouth full of cloves, to rejoin the anxious Rebecca, whose first-born was making wild Judaic signals from the open door of the unprotected pawn-shop.

A customer was already waiting.

Overton, in the most cheerful humor, bumped over the fanged stones, until he reached Franklin Square. "I'll wait till bank hour, cash Jacobs' check, and look in on my young friend Burnham a little later," he plotted.

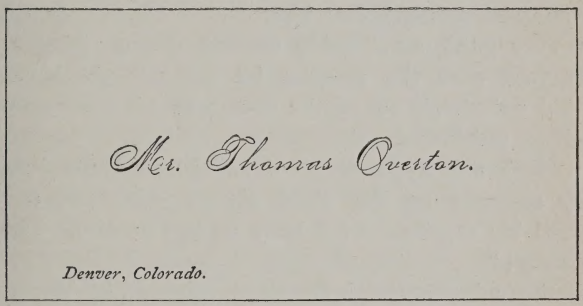
With rare delicacy, and a conservative regard for the past, Thomas heightened his gentle seriousness by walking once or twice around St. Paul's and Trinity Churchyards. A well-defined plan was maturing in that busy brain, under its decorous thatch of black silk hat and crape band. The devil never sleeps!

At nearly eleven o'clock, in bright sunshine, Mr. Overton quietly entered the office of the great firm of Morton,

Burnham & Co. His thousand dollars, in crisp bills of fifty dollars each, was carelessly thrust in his dark morocco pocket-book. There was business in its very look.

Scanning the interior of the mahogany-decked bank, whose address he had gained at Jacobs' depository, Mr. Overton quietly sent in his card to Mr. Ralph Burnham.

Nothing could be more utterly correct than the neatly engraved script:



Mining magnate, rancher, operator—all these titles were at his beck and call.

Seated in the general reception-room, Overton, extended on a sumptuous Spanish leather lounge, scanned idly the financial columns of the daily journals. His watchful eyes, with lightning flashes in them, rested now and then on the yawning vault door, with its great wilderness of bars, straps, and bolts.

Double doors were these. The inner bristled with mysterious-looking combination knobs; on the outer, a flaring time-lock dial gazed at him like the watchful eye of a Cyclops.

Was it professional ambition, or mere bravado, which caused the gentleman from Denver to wink deftly at that time-lock clock-dial, and whisper: "I'll see you later, my chalk-faced friend."

Overton was quickly disturbed in his generous plans for his own future comfort by the whining, soft-drawn voice of Mr. Abel Cram.

"Our Mr. Burnham is not down yet, sir. If your time is valuable, I might show you in to Mr. Morton—our managing partner."

"By no means! I am a man of leisure. I'll await Mr. Burnham. I presume he will be soon here," Overton replied—studying furtively this aggregation of all the commercial virtues before him.

"Very good, sir!" softly uttered Cram. "I'll give him your card the moment he comes." Abel Cram glided noiselessly out of the door, with his conventional business smirk.

"Sneak and hypocrite!" the man from Denver mentally summed up the chief clerk's character, as he nursed his regalia. "I'll keep an eye on him. Looks breachy!"

In five minutes Ralph Burnham, followed by Maxwell, strode into the reception-room. Late again!

Burnham's good-natured face took a graver shade as Overton rose.

"Mr.— Mr.—" Burnham was at fault.

"Overton," calmly said the man from Colorado. "I had the honor of meeting you last night, at my friend Mrs. Ashton's."

A bright red spot burned on Burnham's cheek, as, with affected carelessness, he said: "Walter, step into my office. I'll join you presently." Maxwell, seated in Ralph's easy-chair, toying idly with a paper-knife, softly whistled a bar or two from "Nadjy," and under his breath remarked to his own handsome shadow in the mirror: "Hard hit, old man! Last night at Mrs. Ashton's! Well, anything to get Ralph out of the dumps. He does not seem to be prejudiced against Harlem."

In concise terms, Thomas Overton concluded his business with Burnham.

"I have some mining and other interests. I may have to keep an active account in New York. I would like to open a deposit account with your firm, Mr. Burnham. My business relations are mostly with Denver properties."

Burnham bowed courteously. The calm, self-contained applicant looked far different from the half-raffish visitor of the past night.

"Been out with Western men, I suppose. Rough diamond!" soliloquized Burnham. "In very good form to-day."

Ralph led the way to the manager's desk, and the potent signature of Thomas Overton was registered—his account being opened with a deposit of seven hundred and fifty dollars.

Quietly pocketing a little check-book, Overton remarked: "I have some stocks and bonds I would like to deposit with you for safe keeping."

"Most certainly, Mr. Overton. Mr. Cram will give you a private box in one of our vaults, and show you every attention."

"Pray, don't let me keep you from your friend," remarked Overton, with ready wit, as he felt the business interview was at an end. Overton never was tiresome.

Passing out of the bank, Thomas mentally photographed the interior—as Ralph Burnham sped away to rejoin Maxwell.

"Here is my Austerlitz or Waterloo! Which?" gayly ruminated the man from Colorado, as he measuredly sauntered down Wall Street.

"By the way, I'll take a lobster *à la Newburg*, and a look at the ticker," was the second thought of the new depositor. Overton always nursed his nerves.

Three squares traversed, he entered one of those

down-town haunts where Bacchus is king and the votaries of Fortune crowd around the long paper tape. In the back room, racing pool tickets were rapidly issuing to that motley crowd of masters, middlemen, clerks, and even porters who play the horses.

High noon sounded as Overton, well satisfied, finished that artistic luncheon, which was an integral portion of the advance on Marie Ashton's diamonds.

Suddenly his brows knitted. With lightning glance he had conned every passer-by. At the door, fumbling over the yards of tape in the basket, Mr. Abel Cram was intently deciphering the cabalistic sporting data of the day.

With an amused smile, Overton watched the cadaverous clerk, who glided past the bar, after a hasty dash of Bourbon, and disappeared in the pool-room.

"Ah! playing the races, Brother Cram! You're my man!" was the sardonic sneer of the gentleman from the West.

Planting himself squarely at the gorgeous bar, Overton awaited the exit of Cram, who soon returned, hastily placing several fateful coupons in his vest pocket.

"My dear sir," softly remarked Overton, as he intercepted the departing clerk, "pray join me. I have a prejudice against drinking alone."

Abel Cram was startled; Overton's calm, uncommunicative eye was fixed on those telltale pool tickets peeping from Cram's higher watch-pocket.

In silky tones, Abel sniffled: "I will make an exception, Mr. Overton. Business, you know, is so engrossing!"

As Cram, with flushed face, disappeared ten minutes later, having reënforced his nerves with two strong cocktails, he thus eased his soul: "Must be polite! I may have been seen. Wouldn't do for the firm to know."

And Thomas Overton chuckled softly, as he threw the

bar-keeper a dollar bill: "Yes, you will make an exception for me, Mr. Abel Cram."

The gambler lingered long enough in the pool-room to allow the clerk to stealthily regain his financial foyer. A cold whiskey punch imparted to Tom the sage deduction that hurry spoils all. "Never rush your luck," was a cardinal motto of the man from Colorado.

Yawning gracefully, he sauntered out of the room, and sought a modest bayside hostelry near the South Ferry.

Entering a large room, where two weary bar-keepers, and a pile of very ancient oysters, were the chief ornaments, he rested. Sundry gaudy fancy bottles, garnished with fearful counter-presentments of wicked actresses, allured the stray mariner and the tired longshoreman. It was a cheap city front bar, the theatre of many a dark mystery. Overton called down a pony brandy on the wolfish-looking Milesian in charge.

After the renewal of the usual "pleasing assurances," Thomas sharply asked, "Where's Riley?"—Overton was a power here, by day and night.

The laconic Ganymede answered, "Up-stairs—asleep."

"Wake him," quietly said Tom.

"I don't dare to, Surr!" answered the robust youth. "I do be afeard of him in his ugly times."

"Show him this," cried Overton, and he cut a saloon card in a peculiar fashion. "Get up there, now, quick, and wake him."

Something in Overton's eye compelled instant obedience. In a few moments, cursing and raving, Riley, the Boniface, rolled down the stairs. On seeing Overton, his wolfish face softened a bit. Unsteadily ambling to a private recess of the bar, he drew out an old black bottle. Lifting, with shaking hand, a glass of the "best in the house," he leered at Overton and wheezed, "Shin Fain!" Thomas deftly engulfed the portion allotted to him.

Grasping a handful of good cigars, Riley, with blood-

shot eyes—not devoid of cunning—cried: "Come into me office.—Now, me bye," gutturally wheezed Riley, closing the door of his den, "we're as safe as the grave. F'what is it?"

In tones not too eager, Overton explained his projected raid on Morton, Burnham & Co., with no reference to Marie Ashton.

"And f'what will you do with these man jackeys?" cried Riley.

"I am going to get a solid pull on that confidential clerk," cried Overton—his stern face a bit pale.

"And to what end?" cried Riley.

"They keep a half-million in their vaults, Riley!" said Overton, his voice trembling slightly. "If I can get this fool of a clerk to set that time-clock——"

"And thin—and thin?" said Riley, half rising.

"Well! I'll do the rest," resolutely said Overton.

"I don't see where ye'll get in, me bye," paternally beamed Riley. "There's them divils of combinations inside them time-locks." His voice was feeble.

"Leave that to me," said Overton. "I'm dead square on that. He's a racing crank, and I can pull him. After that, I'm on velvet!"

Riley's eyes enlarged. "And f'what do ye want me to do?" he queried.

Overton quietly said: "Look here, Riley! You've got the stuff! I want a few thousand dollars put in and out of the bank on my account in the next month. I want to make a business show!"

"An' if you drew it?" Riley doubtfully remarked.

"I'll come here and put my neck in your power," said Overton. "I've got a wad there now."

"An' what will ye do," sceptically cried Riley, "if ye make a winning?"

"Skip!" sententiously remarked Overton, "and you'll have your share. You'll see me off."

"I'm yere man, if ye're square," cried Riley—his red eyes gleaming with avaricious fires.

"I'll come down to you to-morrow," said Overton. The cabalistic "Shin Fain" was repeated as Riley, in a half-hour's whispered conversation, got an inkling of Overton's game.

There were broad grins on Riley's fat face. He whispered to Tom: "Catch the felly on his down luck! Lend him a few tenners, and ye have him in yere power forever!"

"I'll make me deposits in yere bank to yere credit and ye can draw lively checks agin it," said the sage Riley, "but ye'll not leave the house when I'm riskin' this boodle?"

"Fair enough, Riley!" heartily cried Overton. "I'll be down to-night. I'm going to lay for this fool of a clerk now."

"D'ye want any money for him?" Riley cried—mastered by Overton's cool confidence.

"No, I've got enough for a couple of days. I'll call on you when I need it," replied Overton, with the sentiment of a man with a bank roll.

"As ye plaze, Tom! Try another drop," cried Riley, waving the whiskey bottle.

Overton was a quarter of a block away, when Riley concluded his soliloquy over the "spirits of just men made perfect!"

"He may make a winnin'," grumbled Riley, as he climbed the stair, after swooping on the contents of the cash register. "Ah! he's a divil!"

At five o'clock, Thomas Overton quietly sauntered into the saloon whence Abel Cram fled at noon. With unmoved face, he scanned the ticker. Holding a handful of pool tickets in his hands, he joyously noted the coming home of his ships from sea. He was a big winner.

Daintily fingering the little fateful slips, he wandered

into the back room, and cashed the coupons in. Reënforced by several hundred dollars, he stood off and on. Would Cram never come?

His calm face betrayed no anxiety. "The bank closes at five o'clock. If my man is dead game, he will be here soon."

Trifling with a Manhattan cocktail, Tom's lynx eyes sought the mirror in front. At 5.15 exact, Abel Cram dashed into the room. Eagerly scanning the ticker, he leaned, in utter exhaustion, against the bar, his watery eyes half-shut.

"Gim-me—gim-me—a gin fizz!" he huskily cried. In his left hand a bunch of pool tickets was tightly clasped. As Abel Cram lifted the cool refection to his lips, Tom Overton quietly said: "And how are the horses to-day, Mr. Cram?" Abel winced. His frightened eyes sought the *entourage* which was not there. "Hellish luck!" muttered Abel—as he thrust out a sheaf of tickets. Overton calmly reviewed the bunch of Jonah certificates. "Bad judgment, my dear boy! You're a good financier"—Cram smiled a sickly smile—"but you're no racing man. Now, look here!"—and Overton deftly drew out the morrow's programme from the rack—"here is a dead square winning!" In a moment their heads were together. Murmurs of "Potomac," "Raceland," "Banquet," "Tea Tray," "Firenzi," "Salvator," "Tenny," and "Ban Fox" broke on the air.

Cram listened for a long five minutes, and smote his breast. "Fool! Fool I am! And now I can't go in."

Thomas Overton quietly gazed at Cram. "And why not?" he queried.

"I've gone dead wrong on these horses to-day, Mr. Overton. I'm a man on a salary."

"My dear boy!" remarked Thomas in a genial voice, "let me make your book for to-morrow. Now, go and scatter these tickets as I tell you."

Abel Cram glared at his Mephisto. "Mr. Overton, I can't go in!" he cried, with a despairing voice.

Overton, in his most gentle manner, quietly handed him five twenty-dollar bills. "Mr. Cram," he suavely said, "buy twenty tickets on my advice. If you lose—you can only have the laugh on me!"

Abel fingered the bills—and peered at this Haroun-al-Raschid of the turf.

"You'll be all right to-morrow night," cheerfully remarked Overton. "Don't you fret!"

And over a magnum, the man from Colorado and the lantern-jawed clerk raved about the staying power of the equine heroes of the coming day.

"But where shall I see you, Mr. Overton?" cried Cram.

"I am always here at five," placidly remarked Overton. "The whiskey is better here than in any other place on lower Manhattan Island."

As Cram, clutching his newly acquired pool tickets in his pockets, fled away—Tom Overton, with Spartan brevity, remarked, "D——d fool!"

Burnham was a little astonished in learning of Overton's large business, several days later, when he faced the astute Cram with his morning report. He had visited Central Park West several times, and was nervously trembling on the eve of another Harlem voyage. "Who the d——l was Overton?"

"Mr. Burnham!" the clerk remarked interrogatively. Ralph lifted his face with well-disguised annoyance. Cram stood *en sentinelle*. "Do you know anything of the affairs of Mr. Overton?" Abel's rasping voice queried.

"Not much," cried Burnham, in savage humor, as he buried his nose in his newspaper. An ill-defined jealousy filled his soul. Always Overton!

"What is it, Cram?" he said testily.

"Well, sir, he's been moving a good deal of money in

and out of the bank, and Mr. Morton would like to see you about it."

"Oh! He's one of those dashing Western men," called out Burnham. "All speculators! Don't bother me, Cram! I'm sick of all this detail. Give him no overdrafts—that's all."

Abel Cram, hiding in his vest pockets the winning coupons of seven races out of nine, discreetly retired. "I'll report to Mr. Morton," softly dropped Cram, as he made his noiseless exit.

"Devil take Overton and his money!" was Ralph's mental prayer. "I suppose he is some rough and ready millionnaire from the West. "He's a cad!" he remarked, with an inward criticism of Overton's garb on that memorable night.

Papers, figures, and memoranda danced before Ralph's eyes, until he could decently make his afternoon exit. "I think I'll take a spin," he remarked, as he gazed at the storm signals, doubtfully flying on the high tower, cynosure of New Yorkers.

Burnham was glad that a drenching rain was an excuse for calling, when he drew up before Marie Ashton's door.

"Put them in the shed. Treat them well," he laconically remarked, as he thrust a bill in the hand of the grinning head-porter. His repeated visits made him a familiar feature of the social whirl. Heart-beat and pulse-throb marked his agitation as he softly walked the silent halls to Marie Ashton's rooms. He was more wildly mad every day with burning passion, and jealousy of Overton spurred him on. "By heavens! I will speak," he cried.

Before entering, he heard that siren voice pealing out, and as the door clashed, a dead silence supervened.

The servant, eyes askance, said: "The lady will receive you, sir!"

It was only his foot on the very threshold which startled

the dreaming divinity at the piano. Marie Ashton rose, her rare smile glowing on the marble of her lovely face.

"How kind of you, Mr. Burnham! In all this rain, to come to me!"

And in five minutes, Ralph was yet more blindly under her magic spell.

"Surely you will have something. A cup of coffee!" And the deity glided, in undulating curves, to the bell. With an arch glance, she said: "You know you are my prisoner—this rainy afternoon."

"Surely, you are not without company!" cried Burnham, with unconscious jealousy. "Mr Overton!"

Marie Ashton leaned back, in a hearty peal of laughter. "Dear old Tom! My brother's partner! He handles all my tiresome business affairs."

Burnham's heart leaped into his throat. He gazed with burning eyes on the lovely woman before him. Her friend Overton was, then, only her adviser.

As the servant placed a dainty coffee service on the table, Marie gayly cried: "Take courage, faint-hearted knight! Mr. Overton left for Denver to-day, to be away three months. He is not such an ogre, after all."

Ralph, toying with his cup, was strangely moved to joy.

"You know my life would be an absolute solitude," Marie continued, "unless I had one faithful friend. Poor dear old Tom! He is no squire of dames. He is a miner. His treasure is gold only." And she merrily laughed, as Burnham's stern face relaxed.

Ralph stammered a few words of *banal* apology.

In womanly frankness, Marie Ashton turned to him, with dignity. "Mr. Burnham," she softly said, "there are relations in life beyond all social criticism. Mr. Overton is the trustee of my business affairs. I am alone in the world." And she calmly gazed from the window at the cold drifting rain, slanting across the casement.

Burnham rose, his throat choking, his fiery eyes glued on that calm set face, gazing out into the storm.

"Mrs. Ashton! Marie!" he hurriedly began.

He was talking blindly now to her left shoulder.

His words multiplied themselves wildly—his sole reward was a murmur from a bowed head: "Leave me, Mr. Burnham, I beg you! Leave me!"

And as she spoke, a glimpse from her starlit eyes maddened the excited man, whose die of life was hazarded on seeing her again. Her back-blown hair—that faint, haunting perfume—the ringing accents of the voice, stilled at his coming, thrilled his very inmost soul. He strode swiftly to her side, and grasped the shapely white wrist, on which a diamond snake was gleaming.

"My own darling!" he cried, as, on his knees, he murmured, "don't send me away!"

"Mr. Burnham," Marie cried, looking at the desperate man before her, "leave me—I beg of you!"

"Never!" cried Ralph. "Not that I am fool enough to think you love me. But, could you learn to love me?" he cried, covering her white arms with passionate kisses.

Stepping back—a queen in her grand self-control—Marie Ashton softly whispered: "Mr. Burnham!"

A dead silence reigned. The noisy clock ticked its clicking refrain.

His heart stood still. Was it life or death to his mad love? No sound from the man whose burning lips were pressed to her cool, white, shapely arms!

With a wrench, she cried: "Ralph, for God's sake, I am not made of iron! Go! Go, for God's sake! Go, with my love and blessing! Never let me see you again!"

She moved swiftly to the door of her private rooms. At the threshold, Burnham caught her by the wrists, his blazing eyes piercing her very soul.

"You love another! I'll not live the night out!" he raved. He was on his knees before her.

Passing her soft white hand over his brow, she whispered: "By the God above, I do not!"

Ralph sprang to his feet and strained her to his bosom, crushing her in a mad embrace. "And I may hope! Darling! my own! my queen!"

"This is madness!" she whispered. "You hardly know my face. You know nothing of my life." Her eyes were blinded with tears.

"Away with your past! The future, the golden future, I claim as my right," he whispered. His arms were around her—he was wildly kissing the bloodless lips of a half-fainting woman. Marie broke away from his grasp.

With a swing of her supple form she swiftly moved toward the open door. At the threshold she paused, turning a white face toward him.

"Go, leave me now, if you wish ever to see me again," she sternly cried. "Don't wait a moment!"

"Can't you trust me, Marie?" Burnham cried in anguish.

"I can trust you, Ralph. I cannot trust myself," she faltered. "For God's sake, go! You will rue this day!"

"Mine be the risk," Ralph eagerly interrupted as he caught her in his arms.

And, half-unwilling, as her head lay on his shoulder, while the twilight shadows deepened she whispered: "Ralph, I would spare you. But you will not have it! I can love you. I know you love me."

"I swear it," he wildly cried.

"Then, ours be the day of love and life, but when the parting comes, think of me as one who would have spared you," she fondly murmured, her arms around his neck.

"Only death shall part us," was Ralph's impassioned answer.

"Ah! God!" she sobbed, and threw herself in his arms. "Too late! Too late!"

CHAPTER IV.

GOLDEN HOURS. ON THE RACE TRACK. AT CLAREMONT. A VANISHED VENUS.

THE storm clouds rolled away. Stars were sprinkling the clear blue when Burnham, unwillingly, left the Circe whose spell was on him.

His heart bounded. An insane joy filled his bosom. For Marie Ashton's last whisper, as her clinging arms folded on his neck, was, "To-morrow!"

With parched lips, he had murmured, "To-morrow!" between parting kisses which burned like fire.

Tossing a bank bill to the attendant who brought his chafing trotters, Ralph turned their heads up the boulevard. Away sprang the steeds, eager for action. Burnham reckoned not his pathway. In the cool night hours, every sighing breeze whispered: "She loves me! She loves me!" The white stars twinkled to him: "To-morrow! To-morrow, we will light your path to her once more!"

Turning after an hour's drive, as the tired horses gently trotted homeward, Ralph recalled every moment of the golden hours whose ecstasy still lingered. Fragments of her history, hints of an unhappy past—all these half-confidences returned, for his only care had been to gaze into her eyes and, with throbbing heart, exult, "She is mine!"

As Ralph gave up the reins, at the stable, to the hostler,

he mechanically replied to that worthy's salute, as he gazed in dismay at the horses: "You've gone a long way to-day, Mr. Burnham!"

With these unthinking words in imitative refrain: "Yes! I've gone a long way." A long way on the road of life—a road which led him into Paradise, he fondly exulted.

Bright morning sunbeams threw their golden lances long over spire and tower before Ralph awoke from rosy dreams. With exultant heart, he unconsciously gave to his toilet an unwonted attention.

"The bank! Yes!" He must go down! He must earn his *congé* of the afternoon.

He turned a cheerful face on Mr. Abel Cram, as he summoned that factotum to his presence.

"Anything new, Mr. Cram?" queried the happy lover.

"Nothing special, sir," rejoined the smiling Abel, absently, his mind fixed on future harvests of the turf.

"By the way, Cram," briskly said Ralph, diving into his morning mail, "have you seen Mr. Overton?"

Cram started. "Mr. Overton! Mr. Overton! Why, yes, sir," he responded, catching his nerve again. "He came into the bank yesterday afternoon, after you left, sir. He deposited a lot of stocks and bonds in our vaults, and left his address: 'First National Bank, Denver.' He told me he should be two or three months in Colorado. He was to take last night's train west."

"Very good! That will do, Cram," nodded Ralph, as the clerk disappeared.

Burnham felt an inward joy. Overton was out of the way.

"Stocks and bonds!" mused Ralph. "He must be a man of some means. I hope his business will keep him."

The tin box in the vault bearing the name "Thomas Overton" was of imposing dimensions. It contained a

goodly assortment of those superbly engraved Western collaterals, whose artistic merit is far beyond their availability in the mere money marts.

Burnham could not know the joyous chuckle with which Tom Overton filled that receptacle in presence of Abel Cram! "Looks well, and I don't mind if the cashier carries the whole lot to Canada. Pretty fair-looking collateral for the West?"

The man from Denver continually haunted Burnham's mind. The rosy morning gleams faded, and the young banker recalled Marie's despairing cry: "Too late! Too late!" Vague jealousy still hounded him on to wild conjectures. Was she Overton's dupe? Was her fortune his objective point? Overton's air of easy familiarity returned. Was she in his power, tied up by the will of a resentful husband, who carried suspicion beyond the grave?

"I have enough for both of us," Ralph murmured, "but I must know all her past to guard her future."

A dozen times he consulted his watch; a score of glimpses at the office regulator punctuated his correspondence. The hours crawled along with leaden heels.

Burnham enjoyed a grim satisfaction in despatching a messenger boy to his florist's with a pencilled order to send the choicest marvels of his graceful wares to the new sacred temple on Central Park West.

While Ralph dreamed of Marie's sapphire eyes and shapely silver shoulders—while he quivered, in memory of her back-blown tresses, and the soft contact of her form, moulded in the attributes of the Idalian goddess—Abel Cram furtively studied, under a pile of drafts, checks, and certificates, the cabalistic jargon of the track.

"By heavens! Overton could pull me out with a few more such tips."

Cram's "cash" was only a score of hundreds short. Alas! poor fool! rolling that ball easily before him—

how quickly it grew. The reality was denied to his heated imagination.

Abel watched the clock-hands drag along to high noon, and then fled away furtively to the pool-room. Luncheon hour covers a multitude of sins. Eager speculator, insane betting crank, sly spy, and thievish employee often hail the halt in the day's occupation. Fair "lady" typewriters, their cheeks flushed with reënforced sodas, demurely return from an ostensible bowl of bread and milk—with lingering memories of a broiled bird and a "small bottle"!

Treachery, dissimulation, secret vice, and mad dissipation discreetly veil themselves on the return from that "blessed noontide hour."

As Cram dashed into the little back room in the pool headquarters for his "latest news from the front," the presiding genius of Bacchus handed him, with his change, a little twisted note. Cram's eyes twinkled with delight.

Only a lead-pencil scrawl:

Detained. Meet me here at six to-night.—O.

"By Jove! I'm glad," Abel muttered, as he twisted up the little paper and lit a cigar with it. "Overton can put me on a good thing or two."

With deep sighs, Abel fingered the five twenty-dollar bills he must remember to return to the Colorado gentleman. He had no safe opportunity in the bank.

Abel Cram agreed exactly with the absent Overton. It was indeed his design to put Cram into a good thing.

While Marie Ashton, gazing in her glass, was choosing battle harness of price, to encounter her ardent lover—her chattering negro maid flying around the apartment in excitement; while Burnham, at a directors' meeting, nodded his silent votes, and scrawled monograms—"M. A.," and brief sketches of a haunting face on the pad before him—fingering his watch in eagerness; while

Abel chafed in the duress of honest daily duty—Thomas Overton was enjoying the hospitality of "Riley's Hotel!"

A discreet morning interview with Marie Ashton had closed Tom Overton's public social career in New York for a time. With plain and bitter words, Overton announced his temporary disappearance. The negro maid had unfolded to him Burnham's unceasing presence.

"Now, I'll be near you. Don't you lisp my presence in town. If you spoil my game, I'll spoil yours, my lady," he muttered sternly. "Send that darky to this address three times a week for letters. If you obey me, I'll let you alone; if you don't, I'll attend to the case in my own way."

Marie Ashton, gazing on his retreating form, murmured to herself:

"Down the stream always! Always down! And yet, I will drift—drift with the tide for a few happy days. Poor Burnham! He knows nothing—suspects nothing. I can't fight Overton—I dare not. He must have his way—but, he shall spare Ralph!" Her face was as stern as the Medusa.

Overton easily lounged away his afternoon, in the comfortable quarters of Riley, until the evening shadows began to gather in Wall Street. The stream of human ants poured out of splendid bank and dingy den, as by side streets he reached the pool-room unobserved.

Long before this, Burnham, in a close coupé, was whirling along to the new-found idol of his heart.

Overton, an evening paper in his hands, shading his glittering, restless eyes, sat in the pool-room saloon, his glances alternating on a clock-dial and the lattice-shaded door.

"If I can get this white-livered sneak in my power,

I'll make Kate do the rest," Tom mused. "I'll find a way to trap Morton. She has never failed me yet," he coldly grinned. "But I must pull this fellow first to his knees, and then keep him enslaved afterward."

These innocent plans were interrupted by the entrance of Abel Cram. Overton quietly retired to a card-room, with a wink to the lean clerk, who was paying his toll at the rosewood counter.

As Abel, with expectant eyes, entered the private room, Overton, carefully exploring the exterior surroundings, locked the door on his return.

"I sent for you, Cram," the gambler genially began, "as I was detained on a matter of business. I wish to arrive out West quietly, and look over some matters there, but this is worthy of waiting for." Tom touched the bell for "a bottle of wine"—the generic American order for champagne!

When the silver-necked flask in its ice jacket was in its place of honor, Overton pledged Abel as the servant retired.

"Here's luck!" he amiably cried.

"Here's luck!" reëchoed Cram's feverish voice. The gambler's toast! Abel's eyes were burning.

"Now, Cram," continued Overton, as he handed him a Perfecto, "did you see the great Salvator and Tenny race?"

"I did not," Abel quickly answered; "I have to be so prudent. They don't like a sporting man in banks."

"Oh! I see," Overton carelessly rejoined. "Firm pretty strait-laced?" His eyes were a pair of interrogation points.

"Not exactly so—only old Seth Wise pokes about, watching his silent capital. Morton's a devilish good fellow!" Abel expatiated, glowing with the wine. "Fond of a glass, runs his yacht, goes to the races now and then, is a first-nighter, and deuced fond of a pretty

woman—oh! he's not strait-laced—not by a jugful!" The vulgar hound enjoyed scandalizing his master.

Abel pulled at his replenished glass, and affected the man of the world.

"Fond of women, eh!" Overton softly repeated, caressing his not over-silky mustache.

"Dead gone on them," Abel cried, with the airs of a lady-killer. "He slips off to the French Ball—catches on at Koster & Bial's—I've cashed in a few of his checks—from Tiffany's, Arnold & Constable's, Kate Reilly's, and all that sort! Little outside presents, you know!" Abel babbled on, with the scorn of the servant for his master's luxurious vices, denied to men of the baser sort.

"Why, I thought his wife was young and pretty," Overton carelessly interjected.

Cram brought his hand down on his knee with a resounding slap: "An angel of beauty! Too good for him! Family woman, high pride, and all that! You see, she's a distant relative of old Seth, who watches over her. And she's Burnham's cousin, you know."

Overton gravely nodded. Tom's hand was busy with the wine. The clerk continued, his tongue a little thicker: "Morton is on velvet. He's got the money. Old Seth can't pull him down. Seth backs the firm and throws the big accounts in: but Morton has plenty of cash. He can draw what he wants outside, and then old Seth is muzzled. He gets tired of Madison Avenue, and has his regular fling. But he's very sly and foxy. He's got a private letter-box at his barber's."

"How do you know that?" broke in Tom, startling Abel.

"I'm solid with the barber. We all keep an eye on the bosses!" Abel chuckled. "You see, Overton," Abel exulted, "they all watch us. We are dogged around, and all the boys in the bank get pointers on the firm."

"Right enough!" cheerfully laughed Overton, nudg-

ing Abel, as he refilled his glass. "And old man Wise—he's dead square?" Overton queried.

"Oh, yes, now!" thoughtfully babbled Abel. "Used to be a regular terror. Got over it all now. Goes in for long day's work, regular habits, austere virtue, and all that. He's a deadly man to run against, though." Cram shuddered.

The clerk became thoughtful.

"And Burnham!" Overton softly followed up.

"Burnham's a gentleman, every inch. Thoughtless, takes it easy, makes friends for the firm, and an all right out-and-out thoroughbred. Used to be sweet on his cousin. That's how he got into the firm. He's got no money to speak of. Bless you, he don't worry! He's solid with old Seth, and his lady cousin. Old times, you know! He don't bother to work hard, as a junior should. Why, Morton himself shows up with the combination, and opens the vaults every day. Burnham then wanders down at eleven, and sets the style for the firm. He wouldn't get up if the bank was closed till noon. You see, I run the time-lock, and we put the day's books inside the outer door. But Morton is the working man!" Abel exulted.

Yellow gleams flashed over Overton's devilish eyes—"Morton never makes a break on business?" There was a shade of anxiety in his voice.

Abel ran along in his history: "Never yet, except when sick. You see," he proceeded, the strong wine making him confidential, "we keep the other combination in the Sub-Treasury. Poor Burnham was routed out once or twice, and it took him half an hour to open the inner vault. Why, I've known a half-million in notes and a cool million in bonds in that vault," proudly cried Abel. "We carry two hundred and fifty thousand for daily business alone!"

"A strong firm!" complimentarily said Overton.

"I should say so!" energetically remarked Cram, bringing his glass down with a bang and splintering it. *In vino veritas!*

The hospitable Overton rang the bell. Another bottle appeared, with a fresh service.

Overton, seriously minded, consulted his watch: "Now, Cram!" he commenced, "I'm going to give you a little show. I want to talk business to you!"

Abel shamefacedly produced the hundred-dollar loan.

Overton waved it away. "Put that up now. Listen to me!" Over his glass, Abel was on the *qui vive!* "Salvator beat Tenny in that big race, you know." Abel bowed his head wisely. "They are going to run a return match in three days. Now, I'm a Western man I know both sides of this fight. There's a cordial hatred between the owners of the horses. The jockeys don't care a rap. I really waited over for this."

"What's the tip?" eagerly demanded Abel, his eyes lighting up.

"The odds are 3 to 1, or 2 to 1, on Salvator. That's the public notion. Fools they are! Now, Tenny will win; Salvator loses, hard held or on a foul. I was down at the track yesterday. I'm on the inside!"

"Dead sure?" slowly said Abel—shivering with nervous excitement.

"I shall put ten thousand on Tenny," nonchalantly answered Overton. "That's why I'm on the quiet till this thing is off. Then I go to Colorado. I've got men picking up the biggest odds for me, up at the hotels."

"I'll go in on it"—Abel quickly replied—"on your word."

"On my word!" Overton frankly retorted. "How far can you get in?" Tom quietly questioned.

"If it's dead sure, I'll take a couple of thousand," the clerk answered, his self-importance having risen with successive beakers.

"Right you are, my boy!" genially cried Overton, slapping him on the back. "You've got the real nerve. Now, meet me here to-morrow night. Can't you get down to the race, day after to-morrow? I am going over," the gambler carelessly said, as he sought for his hat and cane.

"See here, Overton!" Cram anxiously ejaculated. "I'd like to go with you. I am afraid to put that money on by myself. I'd like you to do it for me. I can sham off for a day. None of the boys will be there. I'll get 'sick' the afternoon before."

"That's a good scheme," cried Overton. "Some fool might give you away here, if you plunged. I'll meet you here to-morrow night."

In five minutes, the room was vacant. How many devilish schemes—how many midnight treacheries—how many foul deeds, have been plotted, finished, or slowly achieved, under the tawdry mahogany wainscot of that little back pool-room!

Other rooms sacred to the service of the devil were near by, with similar records. A sober side entrance, of decorous appearance, admitted to the second floor the sly and wanton wife—the erring *ingénue*, her heart beating with a nameless terror—and the hawk-eyed adventuress, light of finger and stony of heart, whose pallid cheeks long since had forgotten to blush under the overlying paint and bismuth.

Gambler, schemer, sly crook, rascal touts, and fleeing embezzler found here a safe retreat, as long as the crisp crackle of the green bank-note electrified the sphinx-like waiters. As Overton watched Cram leave these silent shades, where a discreet silence reigned, he smiled. A Moloch grin ran over his set face.

"I've got you now, Mr. Abel Cram! And so Burnham was sweet on his cousin! Old times—quite a romance! Well, I'll bring these loving hearts together again. Burn-

ham shall console the beautiful prude. Morton! Yes, I must throw him against Kate. I beg your pardon, Marie!" He smiled, waving his cigar gracefully—"We are in high society now. I must throw Morton across that young fool and Kate. He's got the money and the combination. I've got to do it. But how—but how? I must think."

In this professional dilemma, Overton regained slowly the protection of Riley's castle.

With flushed face and throbbing pulses, Abel Cram sat in his modest rooms, after a circuitous voyage. His dinner was a light one. While Overton digested calmly the good things provided by Riley—who lived "at home"—Cram pondered on the method of raising the cash for the great race.

"I'm a couple of thousand behind now. If I take my stake out of the collection account, I'm safe till the end of the month. I'll have it all back before then." Abel dreamed those rosy dreams which haunt the votary of hazard, who has a "dead-sure tip."

On the memorable night of Overton's impromptu champagne supper, three men whose fates were strangely linked together slept in a Fools' Paradise.

Tom Overton's slumbers were haunted by a magic combination to unlock the steel doors of Morton, Burnham & Co.'s vaults. He murmured, in his uneasy rest: "Two hundred and fifty thousand! A million in bonds! Kate and I in Europe! Morton knows—yes, Morton!"

Cram's sealed eyes bore brain-imprinted pictures of Tenny racing past Salvator, under the yells of maddened thousands of gambling men and women, howling, "Tenny wins!"

Ralph Burnham—the fool of his years and ardent disposition—stretched his arms vainly in the darkness of his silent room, and murmured, as his tired eyelids fell again: "She loves me so! She loves me!" For, while the

knave and his dupe drank the wine of Roederer, Burnham—a simpler dupe, a madder fool—hung over Marie Ashton's form as she glanced up at him from her piano, her voice thrilling his heart's core ; or sat, in slavish worship, feasting his eyes on the provoking and voluptuous beauty of the woman who piquantly presided over the dainty repast he shared with her. His life was now moulded by her daily caprice.

Stars of the summer night silently swung up to the zenith, and peeped in through the curtained casement in whose recess Marie, with clinging arms, drew him down to her throbbing bosom, whispering : "And you will always love me ?" Home from the siren's haunt, Ralph, his pulses bounding, his soul on fire, walked in the still, hushed hours, whispering softly to blue vault and sighing tree, as he passed the deserted Park : "She is mine—mine for ever ! By the right of the love I bear her—by the power of the oath sealed on her clinging lips !"

Three fools of fortune—three men groping in the dark ! Other fools dreamed in New York that night still wilder dreams.

By early dawn, two days later, Abel Cram stole out of New York, and gained the track by the earliest train. A rendezvous with Overton at ten o'clock, in a wayside hostelry where one of Riley's friends kept a lair, brought him again to his Mentor. Cram's face was calm. His hand trembled slightly as he fingered a well-lined pocket-book, in his inner vest.

Overton's cheery greeting dispelled all forebodings. "You are fixed ?" he inquired.

"All OK !" Cram proudly answered. For, while studying how to arrange his "sickness" the day before, in the routine mail he handled, an express package of two thousand dollars was handed him—with a request to antedate the payment of some notes of a Western house, falling due in two weeks. Mechanically sign-

ing the receipt, Abel had a revelation of his own peculiar genius.

"I'll get the notes quietly, tag them for collection, and when I double my money, enter this up and replace my shortage. I'll then have my other winnings to the good. If I can get even two for one odds, I am all right." His eyes sparkled. No one had seen him take the package. "This is a windfall," softly chuckled Abel!

So it came to pass that he was ready to defy fortune, and grasp the almost certain winnings! In a back room, screened from view of chance visitors to the races, Overton and Cram passed a merry morning. Dozens of overdressed, loud-voiced, raffish delegates from New York thronged the front rooms. As the day wore on, over a cheery luncheon, Overton and Cram became even firmer friends. From time to time, several of the most respectable guests wandered in and greeted Overton, who discreetly presented Cram as "Mr. Parker of Pittsburg." Abel's last fears vanished as he saw Overton covering bet after bet on Tenny. Odds 10 to 7—2 for 1, and flake after flake of neat bills, quickly covered, were deposited in the capacious safe of the wayside Sheepshead Bay Hotel, neatly pinned and tagged.

It was beyond the ken of Mr. Abel Cram to divine that this money was furnished by the enterprising Riley.

As Abel sipped his fiery cocktail, he whispered softly to Overton: "I may get all my bets here. I don't want to show up strong on the track. What luck!"

After a whispered colloquy with the proprietor, "Mr. Parker of Pittsburg" succeeded in depositing all his stolen funds in company with double the amount by the side of the traitor Overton's ventured fortune, which was really bet on Salvator.

Even the long wait of the racing day ends. With a pale and set face, Abel wended to the track with Overton. The stir and movement proclaimed the bringing

out of the champions. Thirty thousand people, in wild abandonment, hailed the appearance of the mighty Salvator—giant King of the Turf, and the redoubtable hooded Tenny—the darling of the desperate bettor. Countless bloodshot eyes, sleepless from the night's debauch or mad anxieties, followed these champions. Lovely women, with haggard and drawn faces, crowded each other, standing on the benches and screaming with intense excitement.

Pushed, jostled to and fro, fighting against the inflowing current, Overton and Cram essayed to keep their feet. In the last waiting moments, Overton quietly handed his huge flask to Abel. Cram's hand was shaking like a leaf in the storm. As he returned the bottle, a mighty roar proclaimed, "They're off!" Then the fiends of pandemonium were let loose. Overton, stop-watch in hand, was glaring on those two specks, whirling around the course. Cram's brain reeled under the blow of the fiery drink. His heart was in his throat—his wolfish eyes glaring on the stony face of Overton. A louder yell smote the air. Men and women went mad. Would it never end? "Tenny! Tenny!" was the roar. "Tenny wins!" Answering roars, "Salvator! Salvator!" froze his heart, and when the great California giant flashed by, amid a wild storm of frantic huzzas, "Salvator!"—Abel Cram turned his wolfish eyes on Overton, who stood with dropping jaw, and cried: "By God! I am ruined!"—falling prone at Overton's feet.

When Abel Cram reopened his eyes, it was in a stuffy back room of the little wayside hotel. The fumes of the drugged liquor still turned his brain. Overton was seated by the window, his head resting on his hands, and appeared as a monument of grief.

"Tell me," Cram hoarsely whispered, "it's not true. Tenny won!"

Overton calmly forced an iced lemonade on the de-

spairing wretch. "Salvator, by a clear two lengths, and I'm out ten thousand dollars!"

Abel groaned, and turned his swollen face to the wall. Fear and his broken nerves kept him silent. Overton moodily strode out of the room. "State's prison!" Cram blubbered as he writhed in agony. In half an hour, Cram was half led, half dragged to a coupé. Before leaving the den, Abel, in utter misery, noted the swinging open doors of the empty safe.

With pride, the proprietor saluted a crowd of noisy winners, struggling to reach that Mecca of their thirsty souls—the bar. "Gents! I paid eighty thousand dollars, in stake bets, out of that safe to-day."

As Overton forced a reviver on Cram, he coldly said: "By the way, I'll trouble you for that hundred, Cram! I'm clean broke, and will have to draw on Denver to get out there!"

In anguish, Cram handed over the hundred-dollar loan. His glances met Overton's steady eye, which never quailed. All the way back to their parting-place, Overton's arm pressed lovingly a wallet of winnings on Salvator, hidden in his garb. His face was yet rueful, and only lightened as Abel stole off, like a thief in the night, to his room. Then he joyously smiled at himself over his glass at the pool-room bar. "I've got him now! He's robbed the bank!"

When a peaceful morning dawned on the Babel of New York again, Abel Cram, sick at heart, crawled to his desk. His ghastly face alarmed his fellows. One ray of hope glittered yet. Overton in parting told him to call at the pool-room, as usual, for a letter. "I must be off, but I'll try and tide you over a little. I've got to get out and sell some properties myself to get square."

Fear made Cram's teeth chatter. Four thousand dollars short now. Mere cowardice set his busy brain patching up schemes to roll this shortage ahead of him.

Radiant in all the pride of a happy lover, Burnham beamed in on his subordinates at an unwonted early hour. For he was bidden to drive the peerless Marie to Claremont, for an afternoon dinner.

His eyes filled with a strange joy as he thought of the drive home under the starlight—her wonderful eyes shining on him in tender passion.

As Morton departed for luncheon, he genially laid his hand on Burnham's shoulder, passing through Ralph's room.

"By the way, old boy! will you stay down all afternoon? I've got some Western men to show around a little to-day. Some of our best customers out there at Denver."

"I'm a little ashamed to tell you, Harry—I have a particular engagement for two o'clock," Burnham replied, his conscience smiting him. "I am really sorry."

"Don't mind it, Ralph," cried the good-natured Morton. "I'll fix it." And he called up his reserves.

Morton passed out, chasing away a shade of temporary annoyance. After all, the cashier was able to handle everything. Making a few brief notes, the senior partner gave the cashier his directions, and hastened to play the part of "bear leader."

Ralph Burnham's conscience did not estop him from gayly humming his pet opera air, as he gathered up his clean-limbed flyers in the afternoon, and trotted briskly to the longed-for haven of Central Park West. It was a perfect day. Queen Marie sat by his side, in still more seductive loveliness, for the bright color flamed even higher on her cheeks than when he caught her to his bosom in one mad crushing embrace on meeting in her *salon*. It was the pride of possession of an abject slave.

Far up the river, with its white sails dreaming on the placid tide, and birds carolling above, the wandering breezes blowing Marie's truant tresses across his face, they

journeyed into fairyland. A day of days! A day of enchantment! A wilder spell was cast over him. A more insidious fever burned in his veins. When the return brought them to the pavilion at Claremont, where a dainty dinner awaited them, Ralph was in the heaven on earth which encompasses only that king of men, the favored lover.

Merrily the hours flew by. On his shoulder her head rested, as, with dreamy eyes, Marie whispered: "You have given me the happiest day of my life. Claim your reward!"

Burnham's burning eyes answered in a mute prayer, his lips trembling.

"Let us go home," she softly said.

As Ralph left his goddess in the reception-room, to go and claim his horses, he suddenly stood face to face with Morton, whose party of *convives* were dutifully following their host of the day. A wondering light was in Harry Morton's eyes. The lovely unknown! A thought of Claire Morton flashed across Ralph's mind. Gravely turning, he said: "Permit me, madam, to present my partner, Mr. Harry Morton—Mrs. Marie Ashton," he concluded, gazing frankly on Harry's face, bespeaking an admiration controlled by his metropolitan breeding. "Mrs. Ashton is under the charge of our customer, Mr. Overton of Denver."

"Delighted, I am sure," cordially said Harry Morton, with his best bow—low enough for a queen. Neither partner caught the lightning flash of Marie's eyes when Overton's name was mentioned. Her hand closed on her fan tightly. Morton bowed and retired.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" he soliloquized, as he led away his buoyant Western captives to a dinner *à la financière.*

Swinging down the road steadily, Ralph counted every moment till, in the silence of her dim boudoir, Marie

Ashton's velvet voice should whisper once more: "I love you—only you!"

As the spirited team dashed away from Claremont, Morton followed it with his eyes.

One of the magnates of the party pleasantly said: "You know Mrs. Ashton, Mr. Morton?"

"I have just been presented to her," Morton replied, with a note of interrogation in his voice.

The visitor answered, with flattered local pride: "Belle of Denver, sir! Lovely woman! Sorry I did not catch her eye to speak to her. Tom Overton has her affairs in charge. Friend of her husband! Great man, Overton—has handled the heaviest mining deals out West—somewhere here now!"

"Ah! yes," rejoined Morton. "He does business with us."

"Very knowing man, Tom!" concluded the guest, as he seated himself at the splendid table, with its outworks of Little Necks, flanked by wildernesses of crystal glasses.

Throughout the dinner, Morton absently recalled those wonderful eyes, that swelling form, which the silken armor of fashion vainly essayed to hide. Her flute-like voice lingered in his ears.

"Belle of Denver! I am not astonished," Morton mused. "A walking Venus!"

As the party broke up, in the pleased hilarity of a bachelor dinner, Morton was not displeased to see Tom Overton enter. The new-comer was welcomed with Western frankness by several of Morton's guests. In five minutes it was agreed that the captured Overton should return, and make one of a club party for the day's culminating glory—a little game of poker, and the usual nightcaps. Business men, East and West, relax a little now and then!

Four hours later, with a smiling face and a very happy heart, Thomas Overton waved his "good-night," at the

Hoffman bar, to the departing delegation. Morton warmly shook hands as he hailed a coupé.

The little *séance* of classic poker had netted Overton a good eleven hundred dollars in bills, and a check for two thousand more. Straight-away, gentlemanly poker—no noise! and classic style—was Mr. Overton's most unfailing resource, when he could find men who would "back their convictions." Without eagerness, he gathered in his winnings, and laughingly said: "I'll give you all your revenge. I have to go to Denver for a couple of months or more. I'll see you men there. I should have been there now. I have been delayed." He gained the Elevated, and rattled down to Riley's.

"Not a bad turn!" Thomas said to his own smiling face in the glass, as he disrobed in his modest lair. "I'm nearly five thousand ahead. I'll give Kate back her diamonds, and a five hundred check for pin-money. I've got Morton solid now, too!"

"So, she met Morton," Tom ruminated, as he dashed off a glass of the old Cognac, which he never drank while playing. "I must cut that other young devil's comb. I must throw her now across Morton's path. I'll get her away from that downy nest! To-morrow, I'll see that devil Jacobs, and go up and see Kate—ah! I beg pardon—Mrs. Ashton," he chuckled, as he dropped into the dreamless sleep of virtue.

As Overton briskly walked across the Park, next morning, to Jacobs' pawn-shop, he conned over his field of battle.

"I'll get up there early. I won't then run against that lovesick fool. I have Brother Cram in my power. I'll send him a note and flatter him with future help. If I can get Kate to act with sense—I'll make a vacancy in that vault before three months. I'll then try Europe and Monaco."

These rosy dreams filled Overton's busy brain. All

nature smiled on him. Even the birds chirped a welcome.

After regaining Marie Ashton's necklace from the remorseless jaws of Pawnbroker Jacobs' safe, Tom, in studious reverie, made his way to the luxurious nest where Marie Ashton still dreamed of the trembling leaves and starlit paths of her night ride.

"Fanny," sternly said Overton, grasping the colored maid by the arm, "I want to see your mistress at once. No nonsense, now!" muttered Tom, as he saw the distended white eyeballs of the frightened maid. "Wake her up, and give her some coffee. I'll wait in the parlor."

Nonchalantly seating himself on a divan, Overton enjoyed one of the club cigars.

In five minutes, Marie Ashton, her face pale and drawn, her lips bloodless, glided into the room. Clad in a rich gown of clinging white, she made Overton start—her appearance was so wraith-like. "Tantrums!" mentally noted the gambler.

"Kate, listen to me," Overton gravely began, tossing her diamond necklace in her lap. Beside it lay five one-hundred-dollar bills. "You must leave here to-day."

Marie Ashton staggered to a chair. "Leave here!" she murmured.

"Yes," resolutely answered Overton. "I'll find you a safe place farther out up in Harlem."

"Why?" the woman queried, her head buried in her hands. There was cold defiance in her tones.

"Because," Overton retorted, "there is a nest of Denver men on here. They know too much about me, and they might find out too much about your checkered past—my lady."

"Why do you wish this?" Marie slowly questioned.

"Morton, the senior partner, has got them in tow. I don't want that fool Burnham to spoil my game now.

Morton has the big money of the firm. I'm not going to harm your young lady-killer, but money I am going to get. And you must help me!"

Marie Ashton shuddered. "Another desperate scheme! One more crime!"

"Bah! you talk like a girl. I'll see you safe in Europe. You shall be held harmless. I will set you up like a lady."

She mocked him with bitter words: "Like a lady!"

In half an hour there was a gleam of satisfaction on Tom's face. Beaten down, cornered at every turn, cajoled, threatened, flattered, and deluded, Marie Ashton finally yielded.

"For the last time, Tom. This is for liberty! I fight now for life! I will do as you wish."

In six hours the early afternoon sunlight streamed in on only the empty rooms, where Marie Ashton had queened it. Luggage vans hastening in one direction—a coupé with the maid and her jewel-boxes in another—and a by-route through the Park for Overton's victoria, effectively threw off any pursuit or idle curiosity.

With the migratory habits of years, Marie Ashton was soon installed in spacious and remote apartments on One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street. Overton genially shared a cosey little dinner *à deux*. Money will do wonders, even in Harlem!

Seated by her side, unfolding bit by bit of his plan, the gambler led his dupe along the pathway of the future.

"I swear to you I don't want to hurt him. He's got plenty of money. The other fellow is safe in it all."

Marie wearily nodded her head. "Leave me now! I am tired."

"I will. But remember, Marie, no nonsense! I shall know your every movement. You've got to drop Burn-

ham here and totally, till I am safe in Europe. Then I'll let you go."

While Overton talked, Ralph Burnham was standing astounded at the doors of the deserted apartment.

"Gone!" he brokenly said. His eyes were wild.

"Yes, sir. The lady took the noon train, I think West. Left no address, sir," cackled the servant, pocketing a bill. "Baggage all prepared for travel! Maid went in coupé with the hand parcels. The lady went out alone, sir."

Poor Ralph could not divine that Overton picked Marie up in the Park with his victoria.

Far up the road, Burnham frantically speeded his horses. His mood was devilish in its mad intensity. "She will surely write!" His heart sank within his breast. Gone! Where? Why? "Overton's work! No. He is away at Denver." His brain reeled.

Burnham's heart burned in vain within his bosom. "I'll see Mrs. Francis. Surely Marie will write!" But the hours rolled on into days, and Marie Ashton did not write.

CHAPTER V.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER. MEPHISTO AND FAUST. THE SENIOR PARTNER'S YACHT.

THOMAS OVERTON remained in seclusion for a score of days after the hegira of Marie Ashton. His busy brain was occupied with schemes sacred to his own communings.

The unbroken solitude of Riley's Hotel gave him a vantage point whence to watch (by daily report) the growing wolfishness of Abel Cram. Day by day the thieving clerk, weary of eye, fingered the ticker tape, and furtively asked for letters from Denver at the bar.

"I'll hold him well down," Mr. Overton confided to himself. "He must be eager and starved out."

Thomas smiled grimly when he noted, in the "New York Herald" personals, several heart-rending appeals from the man who had lost his Venus. "Not so bad, this one," chuckled Overton.

It read as follows :

MARIE A.—For God's sake ! write—if only one word. Yours to eternity.—R. B.

Overton's secret visits to the lovely Witch of Harlem proved that Ralph had totally lost the trail of his goddess. A couple of Riley's sharpest boys watched the divinity's nest by day and night. No invader violated its decorous quiet. Veiled discreetly, Marie drove out with Overton at night and eluded local curiosity.

"I think I'll return from Denver," genially planned Overton. "Morton's curiosity must be now aroused. I think I had better get hold of Cram, and see how the land lies."

On the next evening, Overton calmly saluted Abel as he stole into the pool-room. The clerk's lank figure was even thinner ; his restless sunken eyes flickered in their sockets.

Installed in a private room, Overton soon sounded the depths of Abel's mental treasury.

"All's much the same at the bank, sir. I have not been very well. You understand ! "

Thomas expressed deep concern. "Hit pretty hard on that d——d race ! Well ! we must see what we can do. I will never forget it. How are all the partners ? " Tom carelessly questioned.

"Well, sir," said Cram, "wonders never cease. Mr. Burnham has been early and late at the bank, and he's got a whole lot of people coming and going. Looks like a detective gang."

"Nothing wrong with the bank, I hope," cried Overton. "See here, Cram! my open and special deposits are considerable there now. Too much to lose!"

"Bless you! no, sir," quickly responded the shivering scoundrel.

"Great God!" thought Cram. "If they should expert my accounts now!" He quickly answered: "Why, the vaults are simply stuffed with money!"

"Ah! Well, that's good," the gambler slowly answered.

Overton did not know that Ralph Burnham's many feverish inquiries of Mrs. Selina Francis had only elicited the fact of her receipt of a simple visiting card from Marie Ashton, with the cabalistic marks of social departure, "P. P. C." Only this, and nothing more!

"Mrs. Ashton was always very reticent as to her own affairs. I regret, my dear Mr. Burnham, I cannot inform you further. I trust we shall see you again."

"Oh, most certainly, madam!" ruefully exclaimed Burnham, seizing hat, stick, and gloves, and casting wistful glances at the well-remembered corner where sweet Marie Ashton communed alone with the stars.

As Burnham's steps died away on the stair, Mrs. Selina Francis sighed heavily. "Caught by a mere bodily fancy! Poor fellow! He cannot appreciate true soul and mind. He is like all the rest—a mere earthworm!" So he was.

Selina Francis, smarting under the continued blindness of many unthinking men to the splendors of the lofty soul encased temporarily in her angular bony framework, infused an added gall in the preparation of her current essay, "On the Mentally Befogged Condition of Woman's Tyrant, Man—the Brute of the Nineteenth Century."

Ralph, fleeing away bankward, swore between his clinched teeth, "I'll spend a year's income to trace Marie." Betaking himself to "private agencies," he spent the weary

days of Overton's absence in vain query. With shrinking jealousy, he refrained from mentioning Marie Ashton's hegira to Harry Morton, who was, as usual, buried in his daily routine.

Moody-eyed and gloomy, Burnham visited Claire Morton often. Anything to chase away the memory of the lost one. How colorless seemed placid Claire, in her tranquil beauty, to the haunting vision of the vanished woman whose very touch made his pulses bound and whose crimson lips had burned yet unforgotten kisses on his fevered brow!

Day after day passing in this suspense, a dull hatred of Tom Overton filled Burnham's heart. "Is this his work?" Ralph groaned. "I'll have his life."

Nervously approaching Abel Cram, he brusquely said, one morning: "Let me see Mr. Overton's account, Cram."

Abel extended the bulky ledger. "Ah! quite heavy deposits and checking here," Ralph remarked in surprise. "What was Overton's real game—business or love?" he inwardly queried.

"Yes, sir," Cram mechanically answered. "I see Mr. Overton moves a very active stock account. His deposits come in from several good business houses here; and his last checks are drawn from Denver."

"Have you had any letters from him there?" Ralph continued.

"No, sir, we only forwarded all his mail as directed."

"Very good!" cried Burnham, dropping the cover of the book. Cram glided away.

Neither of the dupes recognized the fine work of that able *deus ex machina*, Riley, in these well-planned dummy transactions.

"If I do not see him back soon, I'll have her traced in Denver," mused Ralph, biting his cigar viciously. And yet his heart smote him at the thought of shadowing her

—the Witch of Harlem, his Queen of Hearts—like a fugitive.

"I'll size up Mr. Thomas Overton, if he ever shows his face in these doors again," the ardent lover swore, as he walked up and down in torment.

Burnham did not delude himself with the idea of handling Overton's confidences very easily. "It's the only way out however!" he desperately said.

Though the details of Burnham's love-quest were unknown to Tom Overton—as he toyed with Abel Cram in the pool-room—yet he easily divined the cause of Ralph's feverish movements.

A stony smile spread over his hard face. "I think I'll checkmate him! I'll make his senior partner watch him on his own account, and fool him." Tom grinned, as he concluded: "Yes, and the junior can console his old flame, the cousin, while Kate hoodwinks the senior. It will be a go. Cram!" slowly began Overton, "meet me here to-morrow night in the private room above. I want my presence in New York kept a secret. You can do me a service. I am handling a good deal of money now, but I'll try and stand in, to help you. Don't call on me just yet—unless you get in a regular hole. I'll be easier soon. I am selling off some of my Western properties." Overton affected the Jay Gould as he spoke.

Abel's hungry eyes shone with gratitude. "I can rely on you if I get regularly stuck?" His thin voice quivered with anxiety.

"Oh! yes," cheerfully responded Tom. "I am not going to see you go to the wall. Now, let's have a bottle of wine."

Over their glasses, Abel murmured: "What do you wish me to do?" His timorous soul feared the future schemes of audacious Overton. That racing tip was unforgotten.

"Only to hand Mr. Morton—in perfect secrecy—a

letter I will give you to-morrow. I want to confer privately with him on a very intricate and secret matter. Burnham must never have a hint. You see?" Tom's eyes were deadly as a snake's.

"See here, Mr. Overton," faltered Abel, "you'll not prejudice Burnham. He is a man we all worship down here." The despairing clerk only spoke the truth. And yet he was gliding helplessly into Overton's hands.

Tom's eyes were perfectly frank, as he shook hands with Abel, and straightforwardly exclaimed: "Honor bright—no. It's only a private question of business prudence."

"I'm your man, then," said Abel, perfectly reassured.

"So you are," ruminated Overton; "and Morton will be mine too, if Kate stands up to her work." The cards were running his way.

"I can let you have a couple of hundred now, if that will help you," the wily gambler continued.

"Thanks! It will ease me," Cram gratefully uttered, as his fingers closed on the crisp bills, which Tom carelessly tossed over to him.

"I can go ahead to-morrow, and make a turn now," gleefully thought Abel, as he sped away.

"You can go on now to your ruin, my bird in the trap!" cheerfully resolved Overton, as he buttoned his coat and sought the safe byways in the dusk. "I can crush you, after this, at any time."

"Well, here's for Kate!" he decided, as he hailed a passing coupé, and pulled the curtains down sharply as he arrived at the little "rendezvous of rogues."

Blooming Marie Ashton received Overton with cheerfulness. Tom watched her closely. A resolute smile, playing over her face, told that experienced judge of woman nature that in her lonely hours she had decided upon her *parti*.

"If I could only make that blonde devil talk," he

thought. Overton dismissed this futile plan. "Women are all liars," he muttered, "when their own interests are concerned. At least, all those I've met," he apostrophized, as he ran over a rueful experience.

"Let us now understand each other," the gambler began. "I'm going to see Morton as soon as I can. I shall bring him here, and then keep shady for a few days. You must then do the rest. You can lead him on just as far as you wish. He's got a wife he's very tired of. Too good for him—so I hear."

"Ah, indeed!" Marie's lips settled in a sneer. "I am not, I suppose?"

"That remains to be seen," Overton coolly replied, as he took a peep to verify the absence of the sly Fanny. Even faithful colored maids like to pick up a secret now and then.

"If you wheedle him out of that combination, you are then free to preserve your personal independence. Yes—and follow your latest fancy, too."

Danger signals flashed in Marie's eyes. Overton hastily continued:

"Now, see here! we have got to make a big strike here. You are safe. I'll keep you all right. He carries a copy of that combination somewhere on his person. I only want to copy it. These fools trust a good deal to their time-lock. I will not remove a thing from his pockets, but I must search all his belongings. That's your work, my lady—to help me here. I will bring him round, on the quiet. He don't dare peach. His wife will prevent that. The old man's got the reserve capital. Wise never will suspect. And when you are done with him, he won't dare to talk."

"When is all this elegant work to begin?" Marie doubtfully questioned.

"I'll have him here in a couple of days. I have a fairy story ready for him. You can watch his moods. A little

dinner or two, here, will fix him. The old way!" Overton whispered. "I'll work this whole affair. You trust me, and in a month you'll be on the high seas and safe with a fortune."

Overton was gone after a few more general directions. Marie Ashton sat long after his departure, gazing out of the darkened casement.

"I will have my own way yet in this little affair. But Tom must not suspect. I'm no longer the fool I was." The lovely witch sighed.

Marie Ashton's dreams retraced years of intrigue and adventure before the morning sunbeams showed her charming face again in her mirror.

Thomas Overton indited a letter to Morton with extreme care next day, knitting his dark brows over many epistolary obstacles. Reviewing his work over a Perfecto, the gambler chuckled at the result. "This will pique his curiosity," Tom decided, as he read :

(Confidential.) NEW YORK, *October* 5, 1889.

MR. HARRY MORTON,
Morton, Burnham & Co.,
Bankers and Brokers
New York City.

MY DEAR SIR : Will you kindly grant me an hour to-morrow evening at the Club—say eight o'clock. I wish to confer with you on matters of great moment to myself and to one I am deeply interested in. A legal and business juncture makes your advice of great value, if you will kindly oblige me. For business reasons, I prefer to keep my presence in New York a secret from every one but yourself.

Please reply in sealed envelope to my address, under cover to Club steward.

Yours,
THOMAS OVERTON.

"I think that will bring him." The gambler decided to take the chances.

Abel Cram, duly cautioned, received the missive from Overton at the appointed hour. The clerk was hilarious, for a reflex wave had returned him a few of his lost bank bills. And Overton's promise of help! He at least had breathing time.

Tom Overton spent his night, till the glittering hours of dawn, in sorting and arranging some of those wondrously attractive papers, grants, and deeds which crowd the baggage of the Western adventurer. Notes of his story were carefully arranged.

Mr. Harry Morton's eyes opened wide next morning, when his confidential clerk handed him the gambler's letter.

"Came by messenger to me. For your own eye only, and to be given to you alone," was the clerk's careful statement.

"You know nothing of this matter?" Morton said, with a serious air, as he perused the note.

"Not a thing, sir," steadfastly answered Abel.

"You may go, Cram," kindly replied the busy banker.

When alone, he burned the note and saw its ashes disappear with pleasure.

"Curse this business!" muttered Morton. "I suppose I've got to go. I would not want Seth Wise to know of that little poker party at the Club. The old boy is wild at any form of gambling—except the legitimate."

Closing his office desk, Morton stepped out and sent a laconic answer as requested:

Will come.—M.

"Just as well to keep this to myself," he sagely decided, and plunged into closing up his daily affairs.

During the long afternoon, the words of the note returned to his mind. Who was the other party in interest? Was it the bewitching Lady of the Night?

At eight o'clock, Harry Morton briskly entered the

Club. The watchful steward conducted him to a private room, where Tom Overton, disguising his impatience, received him with serious courtesy.

"My dear sir, I am really thankful," he began, without flurry.

"I am glad to be of service to you," Morton replied, with the professional caution of the New York banker. In this workaday world, people usually want little of bankers, save money. Morton was always on his pecuniary guard.

When the usual comforts, dear to the clubman, were provided, Overton, producing a bundle of papers, said: "May I now trouble you?"

Morton mentally ejaculated, as he chose a cigar: "I hope he won't read all those papers."

That horrible fear was groundless. Fixing his eye on Morton, Overton gravely remarked: "You have met my friend Mrs. Ashton?"

Morton started. He had not forgotten the handsomest woman his eyes had rested on in many long years. Forgotten! Never!

"Certainly," replied Morton, his eyes kindling.

"It is on her account that I wish to consult you," Tom continued, his eye catching every varying emotion fleeting over the banker's face.

"I should be glad to be of any service," Morton said, with an appearance of decided interest, not lost on Overton.

"I will be brief—I know your time is valuable. Her late husband, William Ashton, was my partner in some heavy operations out West. We held some valuable mining properties together. His estate is unsettled. It is under my control, and I am his executor. Poor Ashton was killed by Indians two years ago in Southern Colorado."

Overton paused. Morton was eagerly following him.

"Mrs. Ashton married very young, you can see," Tom resumed.

Morton smiled and bowed.

"Now, I will be frank, Mr. Morton. Ashton was a peculiar man. He did not wish his wife to be the prey of every fortune-hunter, and, in fact, he resented the general admiration she inspired, especially in the South and West. He left a singular will, giving all to her, though their union was childless, but stipulating that, should she marry within five years, she should forfeit all to some distant relatives of his, in the South."

"Monstrous foolishness!" ejaculated Morton.

Overton calmly proceeded: "I tried to dissuade him. 'Look here, Overton,' said he; 'you'll watch over her. These properties will increase, and, after five years, should anything happen, she will be wiser and fitter then to choose a husband. I will make it useless for any mere adventurers to follow her up at once.'"

"What's your trouble now?" eagerly questioned Morton.

"Two annoyances fret me now," Overton answered, with a friendly solicitude. "The first is that these cut-off heirs have engaged some desperate pettifogging lawyers to revoke the probate of the will, as his body was never found. The Indians or wolves destroyed it." (Overton heaved a sigh.) "They claim that he is not dead. They fight the proofs. They have been chasing her and myself to serve us with papers, and thus bother me. As the estate is undivided, I have to keep very quiet on my own account. I am just back from a flying trip to Denver, and I must go there again in a couple of days. I want my whereabouts and that of my account—as well as my helpless ward's location—kept a secret, now, from every one."

"You may trust me implicitly, Mr. Overton," Morton firmly said.

It was a gallant service. The Colorado man bowed his thanks. "It is for that reason I communicated to you in secret. I want no one—even of your own firm—to know, at present, of my movements." Morton nodded assent.

The sharper continued: "Now, Marie Ashton is a mere child in business. She is ardent, timid, and unsuspicious. I have no one to furnish her any needed advice, or direct her in my absence. I don't care to trust strange New York lawyers, till I see what I can do out West. I have induced her to live here very quietly, as these distant heirs would exaggerate her fortune and charms, and endeavor to set glib adventurers on her track to induce her by some foolish marriage to forfeit her very handsome property."

"I see," said Morton, thoughtfully.

"Further, my own interests, as well as hers, would suffer by a forced division of the property before five years. I want to keep control, and save her and myself."

"Very properly," murmured Morton.

Lighting a fresh cigar, Overton prepared his grand coup. "The next danger is from your friend and partner, Ralph Burnham."

Morton sprang to his feet. "Ralph!" he cried. "I don't see. I can't understand," he remarked in astonishment.

"Listen!" softly continued Overton. "I told you that Marie Ashton was of an ardent nature. She has been entirely alone for two years. I am absent a great deal. She must deny herself much social pleasure on account of this legal tangle. Her hands are tied by this foolish will. She can't help me. I have to watch over her. I can't watch while I am away."

"But Burnham?" Morton persisted.

Overton looked seriously at Morton, and lowered his voice: "He met her some time ago at a Mrs. Francis'

house, here. Now, Mr. Morton, Burnham is young, handsome, and impressionable. I found out that he has visited my ward very frequently lately. They have been riding, and a very warm acquaintance has sprung up."

Morton's brow was gloomy. "How can I interfere in this?" he sullenly demanded.

"By aiding me to keep them apart until this imprudent fancy has drifted from both their minds." Overton's brow was overcast as he said this. "I have changed my ward's residence. I have persuaded her that she has no right to further complicate me now. Burnham does not know where she is, and I have her promise not to communicate with him in any way until our affairs change. It is vital he should not meet her, or trace her whereabouts through me. You can prevent this. Will you aid me?" Overton's voice was innocently trusting.

"How?" he asked. Morton was quite bewildered.

"I will leave you money for her use. I will take you to her, and I shall send all letters and despatches for her to you privately. I don't want her traced by letters or telegrams. If she needs anything, you can assist her till my return. You will be the only person knowing of her whereabouts. Should it be discovered in my absence, I want her to remove to an absolutely unknown place."

"Is this exactly fair to Burnham?" Morton questioned flatly.

"It is fair to both parties, and to me. He should not drop into a sentimental entanglement with a woman tied up for years yet, and who may be so longer. That would be unfair to all parties, and to my property interests."

"Where can I see her?" Morton asked, his last scruples vanishing.

"Meet me here to-morrow night at this hour. We will drive out there," answered the victorious Overton. "But I am keeping you too long!" Tom's tact was unfailing.

In ten minutes, Morton was slowly threading Madison Square. "A strange story! Well, I shall see her to-morrow night. She is a royal woman!"

The vision of the beauty of Claremont danced before his eyes, and, do what he would, he could not chase it away.

Next day, Morton, with a sudden instinctive rivalry, gazed at Ralph Burnham, and wondered if the Belle of Denver had really thrown away her heart on this easy-going young financier. The leaven of unrest was working in his bosom.

When evening brought the stars to the skies, Morton, with an unaccustomed hesitation over the details of an ornate toilet, entered the presence of the Witch of Harlem.

Overton was content to see the web woven around Morton, whose ready admiration was undisguised. This fresh, seductive loveliness—the lonely situation of the new divinity—the air of suggestive mystery in her surroundings, all piqued and interested the banker.

A little supper, over which the beauty of the West daintily presided, followed. After Overton's plans were discussed, his departure of the morrow arranged, and addresses given for the safe handling of the correspondence expected, Morton found himself stammering as he said: "I shall see you again very soon, I hope!"

"You are now my jailer," Marie merrily answered.

Morton fancied the pressure of her hand had its meaning as he bent over it.

As Overton and the banker rolled along in the coupé homeward, they gravely settled the last details. Morton carefully deposited the telegraphic addresses and memoranda in his huge pocket-book, suggestive of the banker.

"I wonder if you have that combination in there, my financial genius," Overton mused, as his eyes flashed greedily in the dusky carriage. "I'll have it yet."

And, with warm salutations, Overton was officially

"off for Denver" in the morning train, and Harry Morton had a new secret from his wife and partner. He dared not whisper it even in his rosy dreams. Those flitting visions of the night thrilled him when he heard the velvety voice of Marie Ashton softly breathe again: "You are my jailer now."

"By heavens! I must take care of her," was his last thought. "It's a matter of honor."

As day followed day, the rush of Wall Street made the bank a hot battle-ground of financial strife, daily toil, and wild intrigues. Ralph Burnham, distant and moody, plodded along his life-path listlessly. No sign yet of the vanished Venus! Abel Cram, furtively dabbling in the pool-room whirl, patched his altered accounts and prayed for Overton's return. Yet this traveller tarried at Denver. For day after day brought letters and news to Morton, in whose eyes a fierce, bright light of newly aroused passion was now shining. When his release from the splendid rooms of his Madison Avenue mansion came nightly, stealing forth to by-street and dark avenue, Morton sought the Witch of Harlem. By her side, at the piano, he lingered under the spell of her voice. At her feet, he poured out rhapsodies with a lover's ardor. At the dainty table, he drank in a deeper intoxication than the velvet Burgundy, flashing like rubies in the crystal.

His impulsive soul was on fire. His mind became centred upon the one woman who thralled his passionate heart in silken chains. And, so far, she denied him. Till now, she gently repulsed him. When the silver note of the clock's bell told of the appointed hour, she sternly decreed: "I will dismiss my jailer now."

Blinded from day to day, Morton became a slave of her lamp—a very suppliant. Stolen rides in the dark hours, far up the silvery Hudson, thrilled his pulses with new ardor.

On her dainty blue veined hands sparkled splendid

gems, the spoil of Morton's secret visits in search of new bawbles for the Witch of Harlem.

While he murmured passionate prayers—still softly denied by the fair idol of his heart—Claire Morton, his pale-faced wife, sat lonely in her home, or tried to chase the shadows from Ralph Burnham's gloomy brow.

"I don't half like this, Claire," Burnham would say. "Morton never was a home-stayer, but he is now a permanent absentee. Where does he spend his evenings?"

"At the clubs, at the theatres, anywhere, Ralph," she wearily replied; "anywhere, except with me."

"I must speak to Morton," Ralph would growl. And yet, only a growing distrust marked their intercourse so far. "I'm no saint myself," Burnham admitted. "I'll wait."

Stern old Seth Wise, as days rolled on into weeks, bluntly assailed Morton for neglecting his home. High words escaped—in angry echoes—from the private room of the senior partner, as old Seth daily emerged, red-faced and indignant.

"These young men are up to every mad devilment now. By Jove! Burnham is getting to be a good deal the steadier of the two."

It was, indeed, the truth. Ralph, coldly resentful of Morton's altered manner, applied himself with unwonted diligence to his daily affairs, for not a token of the lost love came—news of that vanished Venus never reached him.

Morton, in a lover's dream, moved steadily on in his chosen path. Letters from Overton announced his continued absence under unexpected delays. His return was indefinitely postponed. Joy filled Harry Morton's heart. His soul craved now an ultimate, total and final possession of the woman who had abjectly enslaved him.

A splendid August evening was promised, as Morton closed his desk on a Saturday afternoon.

"There'll be moonlight. I'll take Marie a spin up the East River in my yacht."

Hastily penning a lying letter to his wife about a sudden call to Philadelphia, Morton sent another messenger—a messenger of love—to the wily woman who waited now his nightly footstep on the stair. In two hours Morton's hasty orders were executed, for at the Twenty-fourth Street anchorage his swift steamer-yacht Fantine tossed her saucy prow on the ripples of the East River.

Delicate and graceful as a greyhound, her taper masts, glistening, shapely hull (with its single golden streak), and sumptuous cabins marked her as fit for a queen's royal pleasure.

While the silvery machinery was loosened, and faint blue smoke-wreaths told of the readiness of all, the nimble stewards hastened preparation for a repast worthy of Morton's lavish hospitality.

"I have just time to run up-town and get that diamond butterfly I was looking at, for Marie," murmured the eager married lover, gazing at his watch. Anything was better than this tedious waiting.

Evening shadows were beginning to fall, as a closed coupé drove up to the landing. Morton's nervous hand was on the door. His heart leaped up. Marie Ashton looked never so radiant. Yet, at his warning whisper, the double folds of a silver veil hid her loveliness. Watchful eyes abound, even on the East Side!

In five minutes, the click-click of the beautiful engines and whirring throb of the twin screws told that the Fantine was gliding along—a perfect dream of beauty.

From the windows of the blue-curtained cabin, side by side, the lady and her lover watched the shores glide by in changing beauty. Onward, up through pool and riffle, past Hell Gate's yawning ledges, out into the moonlit

glory of the farther waters of the Sound, the fleet Fantine sped along.

Richest dainties, served with flowing cups of sparkling wine, waited for the lovers. When the little steamer rose and fell, dashing showers of diamond spray from her graceful bows as she flew along, Marie Ashton lay on the cushions of the after cabin, her dreaming eyes fixed on Morton's face, as the moonlight showed him pleading at her feet.

"Don't speak now. This is Paradise!" she murmured. "Let us go on forever so!"

Far beyond the old battlements of Fort Schuyler, under the frowning walls at Willett's Point, where torpedo and dynamite petard wait for the foemen; unchallenged by drowsy sentinels, past the silent, grinning cannon the Fantine darted—a fairy yacht on a silver sea. Sloop and shallop, yacht and merry boat parties, were left behind. The ghostly flitting white sails of schooners up the Sound shone spectral in the moonlight. Puffing little tugs dragged along ominous-looking barges, unable in their dead inertia to stem the racing tide.

"Mind your helm, Captain!" cried Morton, for a moment forgetting the dreamy Venus at his side.

"Aye! aye! sir," the watchful master answered.

So, out on the silvery swelling waves, this later Antony forgot the world in the smiles of a modern Cleopatra. Love and moonlight! Heaven on earth!

Past great blazing lights, on beyond point and island, whence sweet, wailing music floated faintly on the hushed waters, the Fantine raced, till Harry Morton gave the signal for return. He recked not of time as they swept homeward, for Marie Ashton's head now lay on his bosom. Again and again he kissed her rich lips, as her dreaming eyes unclosed, and softly dropped their lids beneath his ardent gaze.

Back in the hushed hours to where the waters rage over fanged rock and dangerous ledge, Morton listlessly watched the lights on shore flit by. Suddenly the black mass of a huge dredger swung in sight. There was a wild yell, and, crash ! the treacherous tide-rip dashed the Fantine into the ponderous anchored mass, dragging away the only boat at the davits. Morton grasped the affrighted Marie in his arms.

" The boat's filling ! " yelled the engineer, as the firemen dashed on deck.

" Head her for the shore," shouted Morton, his nerve returning. Swaying from side to side, in a struggle with the inrushing water, the crippled Fantine slowly neared the New York shore. When fifty feet from the bank, the beautiful sinking water-witch rocked to one side, and went down by the stern. Morton was in the river, his Circe clinging wildly to him.

Loosening one arm, he madly struggled till he reached the bank, where a dozen passers-by rushed down and drew the lover and his lady ashore. Morton's self-command returned.

" The men ? " he queried.

" All safe—they are all ashore," the mate yelled, shaking his dripping form.

Hastily calling for the captain, Morton pressed his hand. " Look out well for the men. Keep this all quiet," he hoarsely cried. " I'll make you all right."

" Now get me a carriage, some one—quick ! " cried he, as he called for a glass of brandy for the hysteric woman he was supporting.

A passing carriage dashed up. Hastily forcing Marie within, " Drive on ! " Morton cried, after giving a whispered address to the Jehu. From a crowd of bystanders, attracted from a neighboring evening resort, a raffish young fellow sprang on the box with the driver,

"Silence!" he whispered. "Here is a five. There's money in this. I'm a reporter!" The driver grinned. Another New York social escapade!

A half-hour's wild drive brought Morton and the exhausted woman to her Harlem home. As the carriage door was opened, Morton cried: "I must have some help. She has fainted."

"I can't leave my horses, sir. It's after midnight," the driver cried. "My brother will help." And aided by the new-found brother, Morton bore the chilled and frightened Marie to her rooms.

In a few moments Fanny was busied, wildly rushing to and fro, to minister to the exhausted Marie. Removing his soaked outer clothing, Morton chafed Marie's hands and forced cordials into her pale lips. While he labored with the lady, the young man, aiding Fanny, adroitly gained the names of her mistress and the visitor. A wild flurry of excitement possessed the negro girl. With a bill of generous amount, presented by Morton, in his hand, the brother wended his way down-stairs, whistling softly as he closed the door.

"I think I see a dollar or two in this," he whispered. Dividing the money on the basis of 3 to 1 with the driver, the unrecognized newspaper reporter lit his cigar.

"Do you know the man?" the driver asked.

"Oh! yes—he's all right."

"And the woman?" the Jehu continued.

"Lady from the country—visiting friends in fifth floor flat."

This journalistic disciple of Ananias neglected to say that the second floor apartment was the home of the fair shipwrecked one, and that he reserved her name for future uses.

With merry libations, they separated — the reporter softly scheming to himself: "I'll work this little mine. I'll give him a rattling article in Monday's paper, and I'll

set Viola Pomeroy to hunt up his family tree. I should say he had rather a wet time."

Discreetly leaving his friend the Jehu, well spiritualized by frequent libations, the reporter with professional pride returned alone to the river bank, and gained every detail of the occurrence.

"By Jove! it was lucky I happened to pass," he cried, as he made notes of the wreck. "I'll make a scoop for my paper. That hackman is so far gone he will remember nothing. I am the man in this case," the journalist proudly said, as he gazed on his ample reward, and indulged in a quiet drink, after stowing away his note-book.

"I will have a few more of your clean ten-dollar bills, Mr. Harry Morton!" cried the man of letters. "I will bet my head that woman was not your wife." For the half-strangled crew had told all, and the nearest Directory in an all-night drug-store told him the residence of Henry Morton, Esq.—Morton, Burnham & Co.—386 Madison Avenue. The reporter whistled.

"Well, I swear! he's 'way out of his bailiwick—in Harlem! However, he's not the only one," cried the man of the pad and pencil, as he sought his abode. "I'll see Viola. She's the girl for this job!"

While the hapless Fantine reposed on the oozy shores of Hell Gate, and the half-drowned crew were grumbling into their shelters for the night, Marie Ashton, restored and recovered, took sudden thought for Morton. He was chilled, haggard, and shivering. Comfortable now herself, Marie saw, at a flash, the immense social danger of this midnight accident to Henry Morton.

Resolutely summoning her maid, Marie insisted on Morton removing his outer clothing. Soon by a rousing fire in Fanny's department, Morton, well wrapped up in blankets, was drinking stiff punches, and the maid labored with his garments.

"Sunday morning—nothing procurable! You must stay here till we can send out and you can get quietly home," Marie said firmly.

Morton nodded, for fatigue and excitement had exhausted him. "Dry all my clothes. Look out for the things in the pockets—papers and all. I must keep this quiet." Morton fell asleep in utter exhaustion.

Marie Ashton's face was pale as of the dead when she carefully removed all the articles from the garments of the tired man. Leaving him to the deep sleep of exhaustion, the maid busied herself with smoothing and drying his clothes.

In her own room, with all the gas jets flaring, the curtains tightly drawn, Marie Ashton herself examined and cared for Morton's miscellaneous pocket articles. A red flush was on her cheek as she unclasped his large pocket-book, and with cloths, irons, and blotters averted the entire ruin of the papers.

Murmuring, like a thief in the night, to herself, she faltered: "Not here—not here!" But her pulse stopped beating when, from an inner flap, she drew out a little strip of parchment. Tom Overton had told her of its general presumed appearance.

Yes, there it was—figures and letters:

"A. C. D. 39—K. T. U.—71—E. J. P. 19—3 times R. 2 L."

With trembling limbs she crawled to a writing-desk, and made two careful copies of the little parchment. Hiding one in a secret nook, she placed the other in a different spot. Then, with a steely look in her eyes, she murmured: "My God! it's for liberty." She approached the exhausted sleeper, kissed his pale face, and burst into a flood of tears.

Gazing into vacancy for an hour, Marie Ashton threw herself dressed on the bed. Fanny, her toils now over, sat near, with orders not to sleep at her peril.

At eight o'clock, Marie Ashton opened her eyes. Morton was already stirring. The sleepy maid served a cup of coffee, and was sent to seek an early carriage. "Have it stop at the nearest corner," cried Morton. Hastily replacing his pocket articles, without a glance at them, Morton hurriedly said : "My wife will be at church. I'll get into the Club—stay there till I know she's gone, and not a word then to any one ! I'll get easily into the house, and be all right on her return."

Morton smiled bitterly as he saw the diamond butterfly clinging fast to Marie Ashton's robe, stained with the waters of Hell Gate.

"I'll close this all up, and keep it quiet. Do you never breathe it," he cried, as he prepared to depart. "I will come to you as soon as I can. Let me know by message and letter. My God ! my wife ! " he groaned.

"Harry," Marie Ashton whispered, as she clung to him, with her white arms wreathed around his neck. "You saved my life. You know what that means ! " she passionately cried, her face buried in his bosom.

"I do. It means a heaven on earth for me." And he was gone.

BOOK II.

IN THE TOILS.

CHAPTER VI.

BREAKERS AHEAD. AWKWARD EXPLANATIONS. THE "UNIVERSE" REPORTER.

MORTON whirled away to his club in wild excitement. A private room and the attentions of the quick-witted steward soon rendered a return to his home possible. The streets were quiet. Yet his wife must be away!

The church bells were pealing before he dared approach his residence. Refreshed and his nerves settled, he spent the passing hour in mental reflection, and a rapid arrangement of his plans.

"I must shut off all mention of this accident. I suppose the boat can be raised. I don't mind that. I'll send for the captain to my office and set the whole crew at work. Money will keep their mouths shut. Thank heaven! nobody knows of Marie's identity. I can explain to Claire."

Before his cigar was finished, Morton decided that the less said to Claire the better, for her peace of mind and his safety. Cautiously ascending the avenue in a closed carriage, the banker was delighted to see his own equipage dash away from his door.

"She's off to church, thank God! Now, I'm safe! The club servants won't talk—too many little social occurrences happen there for them to bother with this.

Besides, they don't dare to. They don't wish to lose their annual tips."

Quietly reaching his rooms, Morton donned fresh garb, unassuming in its elegance. With thoughtful brow, he looked over the contents of his cast-off clothing.

"All safe! All neatly done! Papers all right!" he hastily concluded. He hid away his damaged clothing. With an impassive face, he awaited his unsuspicious wife's return. "By Jove! it's lucky the whole thing passed off so well. If I had been caught, what a storm around my ears!"

Then, with half-closed eyes, he lingered in day-dreams of the Witch of Harlem—his snaky sweet Delilah!

Morton could feel again her arms clinging to him in a mad embrace, on the very verge of death. He felt an exquisite thrill in his heart as he recalled her quick care of all his interests—her provision for his return, and all her thoughtfulness. But in his heart of hearts, he treasured the wild devotion with which she cast herself on his breast at parting.

"How she loves me!" he proudly thought. "She's a royal woman—a queen among queens!"

The promise of her shining eyes opened to him a golden future. "I must keep her here. I must devise a plan to see her quietly."

Before Claire Morton, with thoughtful, saddened face crossed her own threshold, Harry's brain evolved a plan. It was partly suggested by the experiences of the preceding night.

"I have it now," and he sprang to his feet, his eyes filled with secret triumph as his wife entered the room. His customary kiss and usual greeting left no suspicion on his wife's mind. A few sporadic questions as to his trip to Philadelphia enlivened the breakfast.

"No suspicion! All is well," Morton easily satisfied himself.

Growing bolder, he decided to drive out to the scene of the disaster. "The captain will be on hand there. I'll get him at once at work. Then he need not come to the office. I will cover all my tracks."

Slave of passion! Deceiver and doting fool! He dared not yet go as far as to own, to his own conscience, before his gentle wife, that he would retrace his night ride and see Marie Ashton's face before the moon silvered again the river beneath whose current the fleet Fantine rested.

Yet, it was so. The finger of Destiny was pointing the way.

Standing on the brink of ruin, with his future stretching out fair before him—a superb position, an assured fortune, loyal friends, and a loving wife—this blinded, passionate man could see no breakers ahead: yet his bark of life was driving straight on the reefs where the outstretched white arms of the siren who had enslaved him were luring him on—on, where other men's lives had been sucked down in the whirlpool of passion!

Only another double life! Only another New York fool! 'Tis the story of every day.

Fool and blind! While fidgeting in his preparation for departure, his feet would have been glued to the ground in terror, could he have read the unmade record of forty-eight hours. For, while he hastened away, with easy lies on his lips, to seek to cover his disaster and to join his sweet-faced tyrant, leaving a lonely wife in a deserted palace, Ralph Burnham, with dull resentment and a haunting fear of some coming evil, was wending his way to Claire's side.

"I'll not leave her utterly alone. She shall have one faithful friend at her side—if trouble comes."

Dangerous friendships, Mr. Ralph Burnham! The growing confidences of an old lover with the unhappy

wife of a bosom friend! And yet, this is the usual outcome of a semi-detached fashionable marriage.

As Morton cautiously dismissed his carriage a few hundred yards from the scene of the disaster, he noted a motley crowd of people on the river bank. A sturdy little tug was puffing away near the shore, with several lines attached to the wreck, and the miniature crosstrees of the Fantine's masts were well out of water.

As he hastily approached, the yacht captain, with beaming face, neared him. Making a sign for silence, Morton led the way to a neighboring river restaurant.

None of the loiterers appeared to know him, and the throng of idlers seemed only curious passing wanderers.

"Well, Morris! I see you're hard at work. What's the news?" the banker asked.

"All going well, sir," joyfully answered the master. "I found this tug, luckily, and got the Fantine pulled in well on shore at low tide. We are swinging her stern in now. We have grappled her, and got strong lines on her. To-morrow, I can get a diver down and get a sail over her bows. She's lying on mud. She won't break up."

"Excellent!" cried Morton. "Do what is right, and get her over to the floating dock. I'll give you an order for her repair."

The banker scratched off an imperative *carte blanche*, in his note-book, to the builders.

Handing it to Morris, he said: "Keep the men all on duty and at work. Send me a despatch to the office when she's on the ways. I am pleased with your energy."

The skipper stood waiting further instructions. "By the way, Morris, don't have any talk over this. Keep your men in hand. Just as well no one knew I was on board. No one been prying into the thing?"

"Not a soul, sir," Morris confidently answered. "I'll follow your wishes."

The sailor ruefully expressed his sorrow for the accident to the lovely craft—his darling.

"Can't be helped, Morris! It's well, as long as we are all right. I know these hidden currents are terrible in Hell Gate. We'll have her on her sea-legs in a week."

"How's the lady, sir—if I may make bold?" said Morris, shifting from one leg to another.

"Oh! she's all right," hastily said the banker, a red spot flaming on his cheeks. "I'll come over as soon as I get your despatch. Take this money." Morton handed Morris a roll of bills. "Use your sound discretion. I'll provide all you need. Good-by! I'm a little stiff and need rest. That was a hard swim!"

Morris, greatly relieved, hastened away to his duty, and the banker, casting a last look at his submerged yacht, slowly strolled up the street.

Had he looked back, he might have seen the helpful "brother" of the night before scanning some gaudy playbills not twenty yards from him, as he turned the corner.

Morton's brow cleared and his heart beat high. Looking backward, was not his inner thought. Looking forward! He was "looking forward" to seeing Marie Ashton again, with blazing eyes and open arms. He was eager to hear her passionate, ringing voice cry once more, "You saved my life!"

So ever forward, he hastened into those breakers of passion closing round him, whose roar was not to reach his ears till too late.

With an unknown spy on his trail, Morton doubled and turned, finally—hidden by the lowered curtains from sight—driving rapidly in a coupé to his idol's covert nest.

"I've done a very good day's work," the reporter murmured, as, with his feet on the cushions of a chance cab, he pulled away at a ferocious-looking cigar. "I have

this rich fool now in my power. I'll have a fifty-dollar check from the 'Universe' for this social escapade. As for him, between Viola Pomeroy and myself, we will bleed this gay lover for a good purse. She can work on the wife. I'll handle the husband." He peered steadily through the glass, his sharp Jehu following, closely but cautiously, the wheels of the lover's chariot.

Morton, in the fever of passion, dreamed of his reception. His ardor would have cooled had he seen, while breakfasting with his wife, the sturdy form of Thomas Overton stealing up the stairway to Marie Ashton's room. The nets were spreading for him!

For, entering the maid's rooms, Overton's eyes opened wide, when he saw the water-stained finery scattered around.

"What has happened?" he roughly cried, seizing the negro girl's arm.

She stammered, in fright: "Please, sir, I don't know. Miss Marie's been gone an' drownded herself, and she's come to all right."

"Fool!" he cried, throwing her off, and striding into the parlors.

Marie Ashton sprang up, her eyes blazing at this rough intrusion.

"Well, well! What's happened? No nonsense! Tell me all." Overton's voice had an ugly ring.

The gambler keenly watched Marie Ashton, while she told the unvarnished truth as to the whole trip, saving only those little passages of sentiment which were now keeping Morton's blood in fever.

"You have ruined all, Kate," he gloomily said. "We may as well break camp. This will all come out in the sensational papers."

"Have I?" she stubbornly sneered. "You think so?"

"I do. I know it. There'll be a hubbub about this. It will get your name in the 'society' journals." Overton

fumed up and down the richly decorated rooms. "We may as well try the West and South again. Has he been here to-day?" the gambler roughly asked.

"Not yet, but he will come," Marie cried, with a confident smile; "and I don't want him to see you."

"Indeed! And why not?" Overton's hot blood crimsoned his brow and flushed his swarthy cheeks.

"There's your reason!" calmly said Marie, throwing him the copy of the combination.

"By God! you're an angel," Overton cried. "How did you get this? Quick! Tell me all!"

Marie Ashton briefly told the story of the pocket-book. It was her *chef-d'œuvre*.

"And he does not suspect?" Tom cried hoarsely. "This is glorious!"

"How can he? He never even opened his book to look at it," Marie replied. "He was so anxious to get away and not be discovered. He trusts me blindly." Her smile was devilish in derision.

"I have the partners now in the hollow of my hand. We are safe for a quarter of a million. You're a genius!" Tom cried, excitedly, poring over the figures and letters.

"You are sure this copy is right?" he faltered, his eyes glued on the paper. "My life might hang on it."

"I had an hour to copy it in, while he slept, and I read it twenty times—forward and backward," Marie proudly replied.

Overton was excited. "But you might have mistaken a letter," Tom persisted.

"True," the calm woman replied, handing him a piece of tissue. "I traced this before I copied the one you have."

"You are one woman in a million. You have saved us," the overjoyed gambler cried.

"Tom, you change your opinions very quickly," she

coldly replied. "Now, don't linger here. He might suspect, to see you here! Tell me all your plans now," she said, with stern authority.

"By Jove! she has me in her clutches," thought Tom, with a flash of unaccustomed cowardice. "I'll be very smooth."

Drawing her near him, he whispered: "Hear me! I have the poor devil who controls the outer bank vault doors in my power. This paper he won't see. I'll make him a scapegoat! We are safe. This job may take a couple of months' time. I'll fix all ready for us to get away. I can get a report of every day's doings down below. I will return to New York officially, and mystify this fool Morton. Now, Kate," he pleadingly said, "wind him around your fingers. I'll give you the rope. Keep his whole mind fixed on you. He won't dare to squeal after his night frolic with you. We'll do a little turn here that will fix us both for life. Morton is tied up by his wife and fear of old Seth Wise."

"And then?" she cried.

"Europe! South America! Liberty and a fortune for you!"

"I'll do it!" she answered, her face hardening as she spoke.

"I'm off! I'll get in here before ten o'clock when I come. He has to open the vaults every day. He must show up there at ten every day. So I'm safe here in the mornings."

Overton hastily drained a glass of brandy from a carafe on the sideboard, and disappeared, eager to confer with Riley, his *fidus Achates*. Now, the vault secret was his own!

Marie Ashton—a cool and confident smile on her face—seated herself at her writing-desk, and copied the duplicate paper she had treasured.

Hastily enclosing it in an envelope with a brief note,

and sealing it, she wrote an address far below Mason and Dixon's line, and, with composure, sent her maid to deposit this letter in the nearest box.

"Just as well, in case of accident!" she murmured. "Even Tom Overton is my slave, thus."

While the maid dallied on her errand, Marie deftly enclosed the other paper in a fold of her corset, restitching the seams with flying fingers.

"I will dress now, Fanny," the Witch of Harlem cheerfully commanded, on the maid's return.

When Harry Morton eagerly bounded up the staircase, the breezes of early afternoon were softly swinging the leafy branches of the Park trees. The bright blue skies were flecked with fleecy clouds overhead, and, down on the avenue below, the clicking feet of fleet-footed steeds, bearing pleasure-seekers to shady grove and beyond the city's hum, were merrily sounding in a rattling chorus.

As Harry Morton, a fierce light flaming in his eyes, caught the glowing Marie to his bosom, she laid a rosy finger on his lip. "Wait!" she whispered, leaving him for a few moments. His heart beat like a trip-hammer till his goddess was with him again.

"I have given my maid a holiday," she shyly said. "Now, tell me of your whole life. Tell me all," she murmured, as, in the half-light of the cool, shaded rooms Morton drew her to his breast.

When shadows fell across the darkening pathways of the Park, Henry Morton, blind with love's delirium, dragged himself unwillingly away to the home he had deserted, and the loving woman he had again betrayed.

He, a newer Samson in the hands of the fairest of modern Delilahs, had yielded up the secrets of heart, mind, and soul to the woman who, listening to his footsteps dying away on the stair, threw herself on the divan and scornfully cried: "These are men, indeed—the men of our day! The men of every day! To leave one

woman, betrayed and broken-hearted, and swear eternal devotion to another whose ruined life is the work of some fellow of their own. All these fools are blind—blind, vicious, and vain!"

Marie Ashton, after a cigarette and a subtle cordial, fell asleep, her siren face pillowed on a gleaming ivory arm.

While the sorceress slumbered—with dreams as rosy as the heart visions of an innocent child—Morton regained his home. Moody of brow, silent and morose, the cabalistic word, "Business!" sealed his wife's lips.

"I had to see a lot of men. Women never understand these things," he roughly said, as he trifled with his splendid dinner.

Women do intuitively understand many things. Morton undervalued his wife's depth of feeling.

"Henry," she said, with vague distrust, "you work too hard. Let us go away for a few weeks. Surely Uncle Wise and Ralph could let you go. Let us go away. I see so little of you! You will come back happier and fresher for the long winter's work."

Morton started in surprise. He looked kindly on her. "Impossible, my dear child! I could not leave now. I have some very important matters in Boston that will take me up there once a week for some time. Some old investments of my own! I can only be away from the bank from Saturday noon till Monday morning."

"And so you'll have to be away even more than now," Claire cried, with faltering lips.

"I fear so! I fear so!" Morton speciously rejoined. He dared not confess to this loving woman that he madly hoped so. For Marie Ashton alone knew the ingenious little plan veiled under the name of "business in Boston."

The poorest strollers in Madison Avenue, as the lights went out, one by one, in Morton's splendid home, carried

happier hearts under their shabby clothes than the handsome young couple, in their splendid home. The man's heart was filled with maddening passions let loose, with base deceit, and the woman's sleepless eyes filled with tears of vague distrust.

Morning dawned once more. New York—in inverse order of rank—arose to its noisy whirl of chaffering, its battles of the Street, its schemes, and its lying in wait for the unwary of both sexes and all ages.

Morton, hastily bidding his wife good-by, noted not her reddened eyes—nor the pale cheeks telling of a vigil of the night. Grasping his "Herald," he buried his face in it on reaching the Elevated train.

Immersed in the financial predictions and multitudinous chaff of the day, he noted not the sly winks and furtive nudging of fellow-travellers who knew him as well as the statues in Franklin Square.

Rapidly striding into his private office, he threw aside his journal and reached for his usual pile of letters, after opening the inner vault doors.

An unusual hum and bustle seemed to agitate the clerks. "I'm nervous," he muttered, as he closed his private door.

In grave surprise, he looked up as Ralph Burnham entered his room, in half an hour, without knocking.

"What's the matter, Burnham? What's wrong?" he asked, noting Burnham's black brow.

"Come into my room, Morton," said Burnham bluntly. "I want to talk to you in private."

Ralph's manner was imperative. Latching his door, Morton strode into Burnham's retired room. Quietly locking the door, Ralph said harshly, "Sit down! Look at that, and then tell me what it means," thrusting a copy of the New York "Universe" under his partner's nose.

The New York "Universe," whose gilded tower of

Babel caps New York City, and guides the befogged mariners from sea, is the fountain of life to that younger America which lives on nerves and sensation.

Its social stories are garbled by grinning yokel and weary dilettante—its profound deductions are accepted, *cum grano salis*, by politician and millionnaire—while its dashing enterprise makes the great deep of New York City to boil like a pot.

Pride of the newsboy—terror of the socially aspiring—wasp in the shrinking flesh of the guilty—it is a great organ. It can make and unmake reputations, and has left many crippled victims behind in its onward journalistic career.

Secrets of the toilet, stories of the clubs, wicked bits of gossip filtered through fluttering fans, gorgeous European canards, wild political histories, fearful financial embroilments—all these things adorn and embellish its columns. For judicious display and largeness of type, for slashing assertion and reckless lashings of those who catch the public eye, impartially laid on—it is at once the terror and the pride of New York.

Morton's eyes grew flaming, in their wild eagerness, as he descried huge capitals and liberal display adorning the following item :

THRILLING ADVENTURE ON THE EAST RIVER!

SINKING OF MR. HENRY MORTON'S STEAM YACHT FANTINE.

MIDNIGHT COLLISION IN HELL GATE!

Gallant Rescue of an Unknown Lady by Mr. Harry Morton.

The "Universe," with its usual enterprise, lays before its readers this morning the exclusive news of the sinking of the well-known clubman and financier Mr. Henry Morton's beautiful steam-yacht, Fantine, at twenty minutes past one, Saturday night, in the narrowest part of Hell Gate. The dainty craft now lies at the bottom of the

East River, having been sunk by a collision with the Government dredger, while returning from a moonlight cruise up the Sound. From our reporter—who happened to be near the spot, and hastened to the scene of the disaster—we learn that a hidden current caused the boat, at high speed, to fail in answering the helm. Before speed could be reduced, she crashed into a Government dredger anchored in the stream, carrying away the only boat.

With rare presence of mind, Mr. Harry Morton, who is an experienced yachtsman, ordered the engineer, who stuck nobly to his post, to run for the shore.

The boat sank thirty yards from shore, her bows being stove in. The crew, seizing floating wreckage, reached the banks in safety.

We must accord the meed of heroism to Mr. Morton, who, hastily throwing off his coat, swam ashore with the only helpless one, a lady guest, in whose honor the excursion was projected. When reaching the bank, Mr. Morton and his fair charge, almost drowning, were aided by people attracted by the cries.

With some difficulty, the gallant rescuer and his guest, a lady of rarest beauty, were revived, and soon left in a carriage, little the worse for their involuntary plunge in the river. The name of the lady is not ascertained, but rumor has it she is a lovely widow from the West Side.

The crew remained on the spot—Mr. Morton, with characteristic liberality, having given them *carte blanche* at the nearest hotels. The boat will doubtless be raised, as tugs are to-day drawing her off, and divers are working at holes in the hull. The damage will be many thousands of dollars.

The New York Yacht Club has reason to be proud of Mr. Morton's gallantry.

When Morton finished reading this unexpected "tribute to his heroism," he dashed the paper down and cried: "A pack of d——d lies! I have nothing to say." He turned to go.

"But I have, Morton," said Burnham, folding his arms and barring access to the door. "This escapade will break your wife's heart."

"Let my wife's name alone!" cried Morton, losing all self-control.

Burnham continued: "I will, sir; and I'll also leave this firm rather than see her made a fool of. She's my

cousin. Don't forget that!" Throwing open the door, Burnham walked out.

Morton strode angrily to his room. "Telegram for you, sir! Answer, please!" calmly said Abel Cram, with a leer in his eye not lost on Morton.

"He's read this dirty scrawl also," inwardly thought Morton. "Wait! Cram," he said, imperiously. Tearing open the yellow envelope, the words danced before him as he read:

386 MADISON AVENUE,
Monday, 11 A.M.

Your wife dangerously ill. Come at once. Answer.
I. H. ATKINSON, M.D.

"So she's got this delightful news too," Morton raved inwardly. Scrawling an answer, "Up at once," he threw the boy a dollar bill. "Call a coupé instantly," he shouted.

"I'll be down to-morrow morning," he said coldly to Cram. "Report to-day all business to Mr. Burnham. If you want any directions from me, send up the bank messengers to my house." Morton seized his hat, gloves, and stick, and darted to the door, as the coupé rattled up.

At the bank door he was confronted by a new tormentor. Old Seth Wise—his hat firmly settled on his gray head—grasped his arm.

"See here, young man! I want to see you about this foolishness of yours."

"You must get in that coupé with me then. Don't talk here and make a scene. My wife's very sick. I must get home." Morton's mood was dangerous.

Seth Wise growled and entered the carriage. For a dozen blocks, a bitter war of words raged between the old silent partner and the young financier.

"It's all a pack of lies," Morton fairly yelled. "The woman was the captain's wife," he desperately said, snatching at this trifling straw. "I'll sue them for libel."

Old Seth's eyes were very cold as he harshly said: "Claire told me yesterday afternoon you had been at Philadelphia. Was that true?"

"No!" shouted Morton. "I had some private business of my own."

"Stop this carriage," Seth commanded. "You can patch this up and lie to your wife as you want to. I'll get out and go to the bank. If there's any more of this, you'll run a new firm, young man!" The sturdy old veteran stumped away, without a good-by, and hailed a passing vehicle.

Morton's throbbing temples were ready to burst with passion. His brain was on fire. Insulted—shamed—made ludicrous—cornered by his two partners and jeered at by his clerks! Then the club gossip! Lastly, his wife!

"I must placate her, for old Seth's sake! By heavens! it is devilish. Who could have betrayed me? Well! I'll brave it out. I must protect Marie Ashton." His memory brought back the wild joys of the night before. "Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad!"

As he reached his home, the stolid butler opened the door. There was a leer in his eye also. "Several reporters been here, sir!"

"Out, to every one," Morton fiercely commanded. The scion of Albion bowed.

"How did this illness occur?" Morton hastily queried.

"Can't say as how, sir," the butler babbled, taking his master's impedimenta. "Doctor's upstairs, sir. I took the mail up to Missus. I'd 'a' no more been down stairs fifteen minutes than the maid ran down for me to call the doctor. Missus had fainted dead away."

Morton's foot was on the stairs. "Some devil sent her the paper marked!" he correctly guessed.

Gathering himself up, he met the family physician at the door of his wife's darkened rooms.

The medico drew him aside to a safe distance. "On

your peril, don't go in, Mr. Morton," he gravely ordered. "Your wife has had a great shock. I have a nurse in charge. I will not leave this afternoon. I do not dare to. Go down and I will join you."

In fifteen minutes, the young banker had repeated all his quickly constructed tale to the doctor.

"You have seen this article?" Morton asked.

"It was called to my attention," dryly answered the Esculapian disciple. His eye had a doubting gleam in it. How many family crises of this nature the fashionable doctor had witnessed!

With aplomb, he confidentially said: "Calm her when she can see you. Keep all the journals away from her. Cheer her up. Take her out of town a little when she is better."

"Doctor, I can't leave town now. You must urge her to a change of scene. I'll fit her out royally. Anything you suggest!"

"Very good!" murmured the physician. "We will see. We will see. Of course, your vast business; so much depends on you." Morton bowed. There was an awkward pause.

"Join me at luncheon as soon as you can," Morton hospitably said.

In a half-hour, a well-ordered breakfast was before them. "We are going on very well," the doctor blandly said, as he addressed himself to the dainties and sipped his Sauterne.

Morton was still ill at ease. He had posted his body-servant to intercept all calls, and bring him any important news. In an hour, the quick-witted valet handed him a note from Captain Morris.

Monday afternoon.

Have got Fantine on the ways now. Damage not so bad. Reporters here. Have shut them all out.

MORRIS.

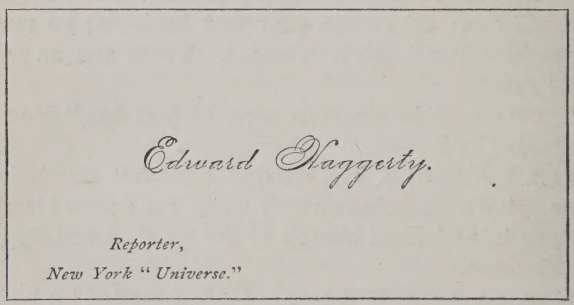
Morton hastily scrawled a letter to the sailor. He had to reveal to him the pleasing fiction about his wife. He gave imperative directions as to outsiders and the story of the rescue.

Morton breathed freer over his afternoon cigar. The hours whiled away, with occasional brief notes from the bank. Doctor Atkinson soon announced that he could safely see his patient after dinner. All seemed to clear up. "I'll get Claire away for a couple of weeks, and smooth this over."

Gazing vacantly out of the window at five o'clock, his valet brought him a card and a telegraph message.

"This man won't be denied, sir," the valet said. "He's an out-and-out sharp one. Had you better not see him? He won't go away for me. Says he must see you."

Morton's eyes blazed when he read, on a well-thumbed card, the words:



"Let him come in the basement hall," Morton directed. "Some new form of devilment!" he thought, as his blood boiled. "I'll fix him!"

Tearing open the message, the banker's face grew devilish as he read a note from Captain Morris:

Very sorry—won't do. Single man—never been married.

"So that story is exploded! I'll have to brave it out, but I must see Marie and warn her. I'll go up there to-night." He grimly folded the telegram and descended the stair. "Now for Mr. Edward Haggerty!"

Morton did not recognize the assistant of the fatal Saturday night in the flashily dressed youth whose ferret-eyes were fixed on him steadily. He had merely glanced at him as they carried Marie Ashton up the dark stairway on the evening of the wreck. His eyes were then only for his lovely burden.

"Well, sir!" Morton said sternly. "Be brief. I have an invalid in the house. What do you wish?" His voice had an impatient ring in it.

"I must see you now—for a few minutes—and have a serious talk with you," the young man firmly said.

"What about?" demanded the banker.

"About this affair of Saturday night."

"Come in here," growled the banker, opening the door of the servants' dining-room. "Now, sir! Proceed!"

"I have all the facts of that strange occurrence," Haggerty remarked carefully. "I know every detail. I will be frank with you, Mr. Morton. You ought to keep this matter as far as you can from the public. Now, I make my living by my pen. I can get a large sum for the full details of this affair. Do you want it kept out? It's a mere matter of business to me. It means a great deal to a man in your position."

"Did your paper send you to me on this infamous errand?" Morton hissed, rising.

"No, sir," coldly replied the scribe. "I am an 'occasional.' I sell my articles where I can get the most for them."

"Ah! a blackmailer!" sneered Morton.

"I'm not particular what you call it," doggedly said Haggerty. "I know the name and residence of the woman you took out last night. She's not your wife."

Morton sprang at him with upraised fist. "Hold on!" cried the reporter, springing nimbly back. "I'm a pugilist. I'll lay you out in two minutes."

Morton was at bay. His sick wife! The scandal! Marie Ashton! His future!

"Be reasonable," coolly continued the writer. "I will prove to you, to your cost, I know every detail. If you don't trade, I'm free to use all I know, after your gentlemanly reception." There was a stinging sneer in his voice.

"What's your price?" Morton said, his eye steadily fixed on Haggerty, who backed away, his hands up *à la* John L.

"Five thousand dollars," unblushingly remarked the reporter.

Morton lost his self-control. He opened the basement door.

"Do you see that door?" he hissed.

"I do," politely admitted Mr. Edward Haggerty.

"Get out of it, quick! Go to the devil!" said the maddened master of the house.

Courteously saluting, as he stood in the doorway, the reporter said: "Mr. Henry Morton, of Morton, Burnham & Co., I'll make you regret this day as long as you live. I will publish the whole truth." And he disappeared.

Morton groaned as he dragged himself up-stairs and threw himself in a chair.

"How much does that devil know? I must see Claire, and quiet her. Then Marie must also be put on her guard. Oh! if Overton would only return. He could help me here."

Morton sent for the physician, who cheerfully rubbed his hands as he entered.

"Now, my dear sir, our patient has had a refreshing sleep. I have made your path easy. You are to have a few words only. I have explained this infamous canard.

Mrs. Morton will understand. To-morrow we will see about removing her for a quiet fortnight."

The two men grasped hands warmly, as Morton bowed the doctor out. Their eyes met. They understood each other.

"I'll meet you at three to-morrow here, Doctor."

"Very good!"

The doctor's carriage rolled away. "Thank God for this!" Morton ejaculated.

Softly entering his wife's room, the erring husband pressed her hand. A few words dropped from his lips. Her pale face smote him. "I must get her away for a rest," he thought.

"I know all, Harry," she whispered. "I am sorry for your trouble."

The nurse held up a warning hand at the door.

"Now rest, my darling," he whispered. "I'll see you in the morning. I'll only go out if absolutely necessary." Morton stole out as she turned her white face to the wall.

Giving the nurse earnest injunctions, the banker entered his private rooms. Pocketing a serviceable revolver and taking a goodly roll of bank-notes from his house safe, he seized a soft dark hat and a light loose overcoat. Calling the butler, he said: "I will be away two or three hours. Let no one disturb Mrs. Morton save the doctor. Keep the house absolutely shut to all."

In an hour, Henry Morton entered the presence of Marie Ashton. The divinity was poring over the "Universe" article.

"That devilish scrawl again!" He choked down his rage.

Forgetting, for a few happy moments, his troubles, Morton at last returned to earth.

"Marie, I must now arrange all for you." Her eager eyes were fixed intently on him. "You have read this

stuff?" She nodded. He briefly told her of all his troubles. The Witch of Harlem looked grave.

"What shall we do?" he concluded. "I wish Overton were here."

Marie Ashton started up with a joyful cry. "He will be back to-morrow. I have had a telegram from Chicago. He will be here two or three days, and then go to Washington for a week or two."

"We are saved!" Morton joyfully cried. "Now, I want him to come and see me at the bank every day he is here, as if on confidential business. You can tell him all you would wish. I can fully explain to him. I will quiet my wife"—he winced—"and she goes to the country for several weeks in the doctor's care. I will then be free to come to you, darling. If my partners are inquisitive, Overton's confidential relations with me will protect me in case of their tracing you. He will protect you, and I will, also, with my life. I know this reporter acted for mere blackmail. I don't fear him. I can have him quieted.

"But, darling," he added, "I shall have a confidential man watch over you night and day. If anything unusual happens, telegraph me to the Federal Club, under this name. I have arranged it. You will be instantly joined by me. I shall tell Overton of this."

"You are so noble," she murmured, with softly shining eyes. He drew the fair golden head to his breast.

"You are all the world to me!" he cried, as he strained her passionately to his bosom. "Now, I don't dare to linger. I will go as soon as it is a little darker." A thought darted like lightning through his mind. "Is your maid reliable?"

"Her mother was my 'mammy,' and died in our service, South. She would not leave us even for freedom."

"Marie!" Morton cried, with a lover's eagerness, "tell me the history of your life."

The siren passed her cool hands over his brow. "You shall know all some day," she fondly whispered. "Trust to me."

"I will," he cried, covering her white hands with mad kisses. "You are my heaven, my all, my very life!"

"And you love me so?" she faltered.

"To the death!" he wildly answered, as he caught her in his arms.

"You must go now," the siren sadly said, when the clock rang out its silvery bell-strokes.

"Yes," he answered; "but listen! In spite of fate, I will come here Saturday afternoon. I will be supposed to be at Boston till Monday morning. If you need help —should there be an alarm—should you need to change residence, I will be with you."

"Overton will be away then."

In whispered colloquy their fateful compact was concluded. Morton, poor fool! felt his heart bound as he plunged deeper into the gulf.

He rose. Her arms were clinging around him. "Marie," he murmured, as he laid the roll of bills on the table, "you can't send to the bank. I may not have safe messengers. Here is ready money. It is helpful in these times.

"For my sake!" he pleaded, as she sprang to the table. "To ease my mind of anxiety."

The woman bowed her head in her hands. "Be it as you will."

"Now, let Overton come to me at once. I want him to come daily and spend a half-hour with me. For appearances only!"

Heart to heart, in fond embrace, they lingered, till Marie's voice broke the silence: "You must go now, my love—my own!"

"Till Saturday!" he whispered, and passed the gates of his Paradise.

As the banker descended, he brushed past a woman, heavily veiled, swiftly tripping up the stair. "Some inmate of the house," he thought, startled for a moment. "She could not see me. I'll watch outside, and see if any one is lurking about."

Pistol in pocket, his slouch hat pulled over his eyes, Morton paced the street till reassured—until he saw the windows of his beloved's rooms darkened.

"All safe! No one on the watch!" he joyfully decided. "Now for home!"

Fool and blind! Poor, self-deluded dreamer! At an upper window the woman who passed him on the stairs, from her shaded casement, watched his tall form pacing to and fro. As he disappeared at last, she dropped into an easy-chair.

"Mr. Henry Morton, I think, between Ed. Haggerty and myself, we will give a pretty close record of the doings of yourself and your song-bird!"

Viola Pomeroy sought her well-earned repose, after carefully entering copious notes in a book, replacing it in safety before retiring. Mr. Ed. Haggerty's woman mate murmured: "I was fortunate to find a vacant room here on this floor. Just the place for a quiet lady of literary tastes!" She smiled as she laid her head on the cushion. "We have them now!" she babbled, as her tired eyes closed.

CHAPTER VII.

OVERTON'S RETURN. WARRING PARTNERS. RILEY'S PLAN. THE BOSTON TRAIN. ABEL CRAM'S DISCOVERY.

HENRY MORTON'S fevered dreams were broken next day by his valet's entrance, a sheaf of the New York dailies in his hand.

The banker sprang from his couch. "What's the report from Mrs. Morton?" he eagerly asked.

"The nurse says she is in refreshing sleep. Much better, sir," answered the factotum.

"Good!" his master cried. "And the papers." His voice rang with anxiety.

"Nothing in them, sir, about the accident."

"Very good! Dress me quickly now. Any letters?"

The valet handed him several. One after another was glanced at and thrown on the dressing table. Tearing open the last, Morton gnashed his teeth. It was a short note on a telegraph blank, typewritten, the direction also in print. Its brevity was ominous.

Monday night.

I will give you a week, and one day's grace, to accept my offer. If you don't come to time, the story of the yacht will be sold. Don't be a fool! This is the last call. Address:

X. Y. Z.,
286 Bowery.

Hastily donning his raiment, Morton despatched his breakfast.

"Have a coupé ready," he ordered. "I'll drive past that place," he muttered.

Anxiously inquiring for his wife, the autocratic nurse refused him admittance. Enjoining absolute denial to all visitors, he said sternly to the butler: "I'll be here at three. Admit only the doctor. Not another living soul, no matter whom!"

"To the Club—quick!" he snapped out. The Jehu plied the whip. Quickly entering, Morton's letters were handed him. "Telegram, sir!" the steward added.

One ray of comfort—Marie's cheering words were before him:

O——— returned. Will be down this morning.

Morton's brow lightened. Driving past his florist's, he sent two exquisite baskets of flowers—one to the

darkened sick-room of his wife, the other to the sapphire-eyed witch whose golden chains were his badge of dishonor.

"Now for the Bowery!" In twenty minutes he satisfied himself that No. 286 was only a low corner saloon.

"Useless to watch this den," he muttered, as he dashed down to the bank. "Shall I see my lawyer? Shall I get some detectives? The police?" Morton's lip curled. "They are all a lot of sharks. I will take Overton's advice. He is a man of the world."

Dismissing his coupé when near his office, Morton walked with dignity into the bank. His unaltered mien impressed the underlings. Abel Cram's face was in its usual repose as he greeted his chief.

"All smooth again! I am safe, but only for a few weeks. My God! where is Overton?" Abel cogitated. He feared detection every day.

Looking over the morning letters, Morton seized a pad and dashed off a telegram. "Send this at once, Cram," he calmly said. "By the way, if Mr. Overton should call this morning, show him in to me at once."

"Yes, sir," replied the overjoyed Abel, who in his inmost soul cried: "Saved, saved!"

For even as his chief leaned on Overton, so was the man from Denver the last hope of Abel Cram, who did not particularly fancy Sing Sing Prison as a residence.

Morton's despatch was brief. Cram, on general principles, read it.

CAPTAIN MORRIS,
Steam-yacht Fantine,
Greenpoint, L. I.

Come instantly to the bank.—MORTON.

"I'll keep an eye on the governor and this captain," he decided.

Morton's eyes were glued on his letters—all of a routine nature, save a jointly signed note from his part-

ners asking him to meet them at a down-town club, next day, to talk of private business.

His eyes grew wolfish. "Ah! yes. Going to take up Claire's cause. Both disinterested! The old man's money, and Burnham's sneaking calf-love!

"Well, he can have her—if the worst comes to the worst." Morton was madly defiant.

And yet, as Henry Morton caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, he dropped his eyes. For in his ears was ringing an old-time sentence: "I, Henry, take thee, Claire."

"Damn it all! I believe I am going mad." For he, with insane quick jealousy, did not at heart wish Ralph Burnham to supplant him, even with the woman he had deluded and betrayed.

He struck the bell. Cram appeared.

"Mr. Burnham in yet?" he asked, in his casual tone.

"Oh! yes, sir—very early. Came in with Mr. Maxwell and got his mail. He'll be back at three o'clock."

"All right, Cram! I'll leave him a note. Mr. Wise here yet?" a timorous shaking in his voice.

"No, sir," Cram answered, as he closed the door.

"I'll face them to-morrow," mused Morton. "I've got leeway now. I can square all with Overton. By Jove! if I am cornered, he can swear he was to be of the party and got left. Sickness, or some fool excuse! I'll watch the whole lot. But this blackmailer! If I could trap him." Morton's face looked like murder.

He knew not that Mr. Ed. Haggerty was resolved to have no more private interviews. He followed the useful old maxim: *Qui facit per alium facit per se.*

In perfect calmness, Morton attended to his business routine. Would Overton never come? At 11.15 Mr. Abel Cram softly entered. "Mr. Overton's in the bank—making some deposits. Shall I show him in, sir?"

Morton nodded genially. His smile would have flitted

away had he known that Overton's deposit was his own thousand dollars, left with Marie Ashton, and a few stray hundreds picked up at poker around the hotels and racing pool-rooms.

"Ah! my dear sir," said the banker, rising, when Thomas Overton entered the room. Overton's parade costume was a cross between a swell Episcopalian rector and a patrimonial millionnaire. Richness and sobriety judiciously mingled! Overton's manner was that of a man without a care or a worry. His admirable digestion and automatic conscience stood him as towers of strength on show days like this, or battle nights with the painted pictures! Classic poker will prepare a man for any turns of fortune's wheel.

Grasping the financier's hand, Overton carefully selected a Henry Clay from Morton's best box. For the banker's cigars and manners were shaded to suit his varying interviews.

"Back again, thank God! I'm tired of the West. I'll settle here, I think," Overton said, as he threw his match away. "But you are busy? I fear I interrupt," he apologized, replacing his bank-book as he spoke.

"Oh, no! It's an off day," Morton rejoined. "I want to see you myself," he said earnestly.

"Then let's go over to the Insurance Club, and get a lobster and a glass of wine," Overton said.

"Certainly," replied Morton. As the gentlemen passed out of the bank, Morton murmured to Cram: "Back at one! Send for me to Insurance Club."

Cram bowed over the book on which he was entering some thieving misstatements to cover the Salvator-Tenny episode.

Overton's eyes met Abel's. The clerk never blenched. He was on duty!

"Capable man!" said Overton, as they threaded the angular exits.

"Invaluable!" Morton answered. "Our mainstay! Perfect habits—great ability—trusted employee."

"Ah! a treasure. Such men are rare," disjointedly replied the gambler, with a peculiar smile.

At the door, Seth Wise—red of face, fiery of eye—seized Morton by the arm: "You're going out? I want to speak a moment to you." His manner was excited.

"Pardon!" Morton rejoined, with *sang-froid*. "Mr. Wise—Mr. Overton. One of our best new customers!" he uttered, in a stage whisper, meant to reach Tom's ear. "Very active account!" Seth Wise's face mollified. "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Overton!" Thomas lifted his hat and nursed his regalia. An hour with Marie had enabled him to mentally photograph the whole of these shifting scenes.

In Burnham's room at the end of the corridor, Seth Wise said, "Why am I denied access to your wife, sir?" in a fierce tone.

"Simply because she's sick and nervous," Morton replied. "Doctor Atkinson won't even let me see her but once a day. She's going out of town for two or three weeks."

"You should have told me," the old man testily replied.

"How could I tell you, if I didn't see you?" Morton sensibly answered. "I've been fretted enough. Will you wait till I return? I'm going to lunch with Overton. He's a strong man."

"All right!" growled Wise, as he entered his own room. "Where's Burnham?"

"Away on some of his d——d trifling!" Morton energetically replied, as he strode out.

"Have I done Harry an injustice?" poor bothered old Seth mused, as he mopped his burning face. "Well, everything for Claire! I'll see her soon. I'll probe this."

In a private room of the Insurance Club, Morton and Overton discoursed at length, after the lobster and wine was discussed. Morton relieved his heart of the whole story, as suited to his views.

Overton leaned back and closed his eyes, from time to time blowing great smoke-rings in the air. Ordering a fresh bottle of wine, he said, as the steward retired: "Now, Mr. Morton, I wish to thank you for your chivalric conduct to Mrs. Ashton. She has told me all. I have to go to Washington in a couple of days. I hope this little scandal and tiff with your partners will soon blow over. I'll put a safe watch over my ward. It would be unjust to you, if she would move in face of these rumors. I shall rémain in New York permanently. I'll back you in this. She must stay here for a time." Morton's eyes shone in joy.

Overton continued: "Don't make a single move. Use no outside agencies. Notice no blackmail. Let your lawyers alone. Call and see Mrs. Ashton and reassure her, while I'm away at Washington."

And the two newly bound friends arranged private communication at the Club. "I'll come in and see you to-morrow and next day. If pushed to the wall, you can use me to cover this unfortunate dilemma arising from your hospitality. But," he added, "don't let Burnham ever get on Mrs. Ashton's track. He would be very intractable, and prejudice your wife's interests and your own with Wise. You have been very helpful to Mrs. Ashton and myself in your judicious advice and attentions."

At the bank door they separated. Morton passed Abel with a glance of inquiry. "Captain Morris in waiting-room, sir."

"Send him in," sharply answered the banker. "Sit down, Morris!" kindly began Morton. The sailor was ill at ease.

"I hardly know what to say, sir—I'm that worried

with keeping the men together. The boat's all right—she'll come out beautiful."

"Devil take the boat! I wish I'd never seen her," Morton roared. "What's the matter now? Can't you control your men?"

Morris' honest face flushed. "I don't want to bother you, sir, but the men are followed up and devilled! There's people hanging round for no good. Here's Mr. Burnham asking me if I am married"—(Morton bounded from his chair)—"and he had a young gentleman with him."

"What did you say?" Morton almost screamed.

"I had to tell him the truth," the sailor replied simply. "And one or two of the men drink a bit, sir, an' these other chaps have got a description of the lady who was on board from the waiters, and I can't get to my work for this devilment."

"Discharge the whole crew," Morton snorted. "No! hold! when will your repairs be done?"

"In four days, sir, but she won't be fit for you yet."

"Send your men up to New London, by train to-night. Put your best man in charge to keep them together. Let them all wait orders there."

"The engineer's the man to hold them down," Morris remarked.

"Good! Then take an engineer and a couple of men from the ship-works, and get up there when the boat's done at once. Telegraph me from there your plan. No foolishness, now! Here's a check! Telegraph when you want more. Don't leave them a minute till you start. Don't come back here. I can trust you?"

"Yes, sir," said the honest sailor, and he was off with a handful of cigars.

"So! Mr. Ralph Burnham—*you, too*, are playing the spy and cur! It was Maxwell, with you." Morton felt for his revolver. "I would like to kill him. But I must

be off to Claire." Decorously leaving the bank, he had a pleasant parting word with Seth Wise. "I'll meet you to-morrow and explain all." Wise grasped his hand. "You can go out and see Claire yourself. I am going to send her off."

While Morton hastened to his wife, Thomas Overton and Marie Ashton were softly laughing over their wine, in her boudoir, at the antics of the Wall Street rat in a Harlem trap.

"Take it easy, Kate," the gambler said. "He'll tie himself up so tight, we don't need to make the knot. It's a true love-knot"—Overton sneered, as he drained a cognac before keeping his tryst with the anxious Abel, who waited for him at the pool-room.

As Overton was leaving, a telegram was handed to Marie:

Will be up at eight to-night.

Overton merrily laughed. "You won't be lonely!" as he closed the door, pointing with a smile to the costly flowers.

Morton had time to think of the Harlem goddess, thus, before he met the suave Dr. Atkinson at his own doors.

"All well, sir! Perfectly able to take the train. I have found the very place. It is under control of a colleague. The maid has packed all necessaries. I'll send the nurse, too." The medico was politely self-important.

Morton's heart beat easier. "Doctor, I'll send my valet also. He's a very useful man."

"Very good, very good," the physician replied. "Now, go up and cheer her a bit. Tell her you'll run down and see her once or twice a week. Send a family friend or two down also."

There was a world of suggestion in Atkinson's smooth face. Morton knew he would find all this extra interest

in the bill. *N'importe!* He was happy. Claire out of the way—Wise placated—Overton at his back—and Marie Ashton to remain near him. Oh, for the blessed coming Saturday noon!

With tender solicitude, he joined his wife. Eagerly assisting, the untiring Morton was not at rest until the whole party rolled out of the Forty-second Street Depot, under escort of the physician.

Bending over his wife, who was silent and sadly affectionate, he whispered: "I'll send a telegram twice a day, and Uncle Wise will be down to-morrow afternoon. I will be down before Saturday, for I have to go to Boston then."

"Harry," the dark-eyed wife whispered from her pillows, "can't you spend Sunday with me?"

Morton calmly lied as he said: "Business, my own, prevents, but I will come next Tuesday. I'll write to you every day."

As the train rolled out, he flattered himself his valet understood the private directions. The sly servant, impassive in his face, was figuring on an increase of wages, as the train tore through the tunnel.

After a careful study of the "Boston trains for Saturday, Sunday, and Monday," Morton sauntered out of the depot. Do what he would, a pair of gentle dark eyes haunted him. He heard a pleading voice saying: "Can't you spend Sunday with me, Harry?" He shivered slightly. "I've caught a cold. I think I'll try a cocktail at the Grand Central"—and as he raised his glass before the bar, a dream of a fair-faced witch, with golden hair, her blue eyes shining, her white arms opened to him, chased away the gentle wraith of Claire, his own unloved wife.

The silver bell on Marie's mantel was chiming eight when Morton, swiftly striding across the tufted floor, was clasped in the embrace of the waiting witch.

Elysium—frenzy—maddening anticipated joys—all would have been naught to him, could he have seen watchful Viola Pomeroy glide up the staircase after him, to the room above, where Ed. Haggerty and herself were completing a veracious chronicle, "for private circulation," entitled "The Moonlight Cruise of the Yacht Fantine."

Overton and Abel, in calm discourse, at the pool-room, in an upper chamber were plotting to capture the racing odds, and Abel, with flushed face, detailed to Overton the upheaval in the staid firm of Morton, Burnham & Co.

As Morton stealthily fled away to his lonely home, Overton, in sage council with Riley, at his hotel, communed with that veteran *intrigant* as to the best means of leaving New York, silently and safely—as well as suddenly—for a haven of foreign rest.

Mr. Riley was ignorant of the copied combination in Overton's possession. The scheme to get at the bank funds was as yet a vague one. The two villains consulted with each other for hours.

Morton's arrival at the bank next day was with unruffled brow. He had appointed eleven as the hour for the interview by his note in reply. At a quarter of eleven, Seth Wise entered, pleasantly greeting him. Abel Cram presented a note saying Burnham was at the Club. In ten minutes the three partners were face to face. The perfect privacy of the room was undoubted. Refreshments were ordered, as a matter of form.

"I can't understand him," Morton ruminated, for Ralph Burnham was taciturn and merely bowed.

"Well, gentlemen!" Morton calmly said, lighting a cigar, "I am ready. What is the business?"

Seth Wise fidgeted and looked at Burnham, who coldly began.

"The business is this. I am not satisfied with the affair of last week. I am not willing to be made ridic-

ulous. On my own behalf—on behalf of my cousin—I want an honest explanation of that matter, or I want to leave the firm."

Morton flushed. "Had you not better let Mr. Wise guard your cousin's interests? She was his ward and is my wife. If you talk to me, sir, talk of the firm's matters, or I will cut this short." The husband's eyes were fierce. Old Seth Wise looked from one to the other in embarrassment. It was, then, war.

"I'll cut it short," Burnham said. "Morton, you are going to the devil! You deceived your wife about that Philadelphia trip. You drove her half-mad with your escapade. You deceived me about the woman who was with you." Old Seth opened his eyes in wonder.

"What's this?" he sternly said, laying his hand on Morton's arm. "You told me, sir, it was the captain's wife."

"The captain has no wife," Burnham firmly said. "At least, he told me so to-day himself."

"Then you are a spy and a sneak!" Morton roared, clutching at Burnham.

"And you are a liar and wife deceiver!" Burnham shouted, backing away. "Don't you move a step. If you touch me, you're a dead man."

Seth Wise stepped between. "Stop this! By God! I will have it stopped. I'll have the police."

The two young men glared at each other from opposite ends of the room.

"Answer me," Wise demanded of Morton, "who was the lady on the yacht?"

"It's a matter of honor. I can't answer," sullenly faltered Morton.

"Do you know?" Wise wolfishly asked Burnham.

"I only know she was a beautiful woman, and lives on the West Side; but I will know all, and you shall, too," Burnham defiantly replied. "I also want to leave the

firm. Mr. Wise, you can do as you wish. I am done. I know where such criminal folly leads men to." Burnham glared fiercely.

Old Seth Wise turned to Morton, his eyes filled with tears. "Henry, will you explain so that I can see your wife as an honest man to-morrow? Give us any reasonable explanation." His voice was almost pleading.

"I refuse to discuss my private affairs with any one. I have no answer. As for the firm, do what you wish," Morton coldly said. "I shall leave the room. I have heard enough."

Seth Wise arose gravely from the chair he had occupied. "Henry Morton, I will see you alone, at ten o'clock to-morrow. If you cannot clear this up, I will give you the formal three months' notice, and withdraw my money from the firm."

"I'll take the notice now," cried Morton, thoroughly enraged.

"Wait, young man!" Seth Wise sternly said, and the three separated without a word.

"A nice little sociable time!" sneered the steward as the three partners walked separately away. Even his liberal douceur grated on the servant's nerves. "A good old family row, I suppose!"

Morton paced his rooms like a tiger half the night. Promptly at the bank, next day, he coldly received the notice, and returned his formal consent to the dissolution of the firm. "I only ask," he briefly said, "that the liquidation begin December 1st, as your funds, sir," said he, bowing to Seth Wise, "will be then ready. You, I believe, have no capital," he coldly said to Burnham, who moved not a muscle. "I shall be at my daily duties, as usual. I expect you now to do the same. After December 1st we will all sign in liquidation, and have the accounts experted. You wish this kept secret for the present? I am sure I do." Both bowed. "That is all

I have to say," said the manager. "Mr. Wise, there is my wife's address. You are free to go and see her. Mr. Burnham, I request you will never enter my house again."

Burnham never moved. It was now war to the knife. Overton and Riley were meanwhile busied at the ferry-side, in a snug sanctum, also engaged with the affairs of the bank.

"I have it all worked out now, Tom," said Riley. "I'll take you to a Spanish West India trader—a close friend of mine—who'll make you safe for a century. We're in a lot of secret business together. Cigars—brandy—foreign goods—oh! he's all dead safe and solid. Bless yer sowl! he's a Fifth Avenue man. An' he has too much to lose! Besides, he's in me own power," Riley whispered.

"What is he—a trader?" Overton repeated.

"Yes; a smuggler, and a secret devil! He's a sharp one," Riley said. "He's a Consul for one of thim divils of leetle Republics down there. He can make papers all right for the boats, an' he's dead solid with the Custom House here. Why, he's a clubman. Ah! he's an out-and-out highflyer, an' he's a deucedly smooth divil—an' rich—that he is!"

"Why, he plays a cool game," Overton admiringly answered.

"I should say he did!" Riley cried, taking a pull at his cold whiskey punch. Lowering his voice, he whispered: "I get nearly all my good stock through him—brandy, Jamaica rum, an' Havanas! Ye see, my boy, we've two or three flying schooners an' brigs, always moving. Oliviera can always load firearms, cartridges, and all paying goods on the sly here. He makes the papers. We have four or five old buccaneer island harbors down there in the Spanish main. He is in with them Dago officials and nigger generals. We run the stuff into them little Republics and save all the duties.

Comin' back, we can take a dash over to the Florida coast, an' land a good load of Havanas. We're in with all thim there beachcombers an' wreckers, an' all those smart divils of the Spanish main. Oh! they are the wicked ones!"

"Riley, would it be safe for me to run down there? I'll have a nice woman with me," Overton slowly said.

"Ah! there's a ladye in this case, thin?" Riley grinned.

"Yes, and a devilish handsome one, too!" Tom replied, with a twirl at his tigerish mustache.

"Ye're the divil's own boy, I'll be bound," chuckled the Boniface, as he filled Overton's glass and punched his ribs playfully. "Now, let me tell you—we'll give ye a flyer, with a good separate cabin for yere canary-bird. We've one will beat the world. Ofttimes we've run in an' out these rivolutionists an' Cuban generals, an' all that. We'll load her with a good cargo, have her clearance, and let her lie in the Lower Bay a week or so. We'll take out papers for trading in the West Indies. Ye can send all your loose stuff to me, and put your lady frind aboard safe an' quiet. When ye make yere big stroke, I'll shove ye on board in Tim Dolan's tug the Faugh à Ballagh. Slip out quietly, and in the morning—ye're a hundred miles from Sandy Hook. Down ye run to the islands—we'll treat ye there like a lord—and ye can get over to Spain, or Brazil, or Honduras, or divil knows where from there. Yere lady will live like a princess. I've been down myself."

"You!" Overton said, in astonishment.

"D'ye remember Sharkey the murderer, that walked out of the Tombs in daylight? I helped run him out—an' that's the scheme we worked. 'Twas broad daylight, too," said Riley, with pride.

"Riley, you're a genius!" Tom cried.

"Ye see," the cunning Irishman proudly said, "we're

all simple people here, we city front lads. But we're dead solid with Tammany, an' the police, an' the customs. If yere boat was overhauled, we could hide you an' the lady. We've places fixed for them rivolutionists. As for you, anyway—ye old villain—a sou'wester, a good shave, and a sailor's outfit would pass the Inspector himself. Now, make yere game, an' I'll do ye right!"

Overton shook hands and strolled up to the pool-rooms.

"Cram, what was up to-day? I wanted to see Morton," Tom said, when the two friends were in their haunt. "He sent word out to excuse me till to-morrow. I have to go on to Washington for a few days."

"There's been a big all-round row in the firm," Abel replied earnestly. "This foolishness of Morton's about that yacht scandal has driven old Wise and Burnham crazy. They've all been wrangling, and they hardly speak."

"Ah! Trouble ahead!" the gambler joyfully cried.

"Yes," Cram retorted, "and if anything should happen, I would go to the wall, if they experted my books. You are my only help now, Overton!"

"How much are you behind?" Overton asked, with an affectation of carelessness.

"Five thousand and more," Abel groaned.

"Well, you had better get at a little more and get out," the gambler coldly said.

Abel's head dropped in his hands. "I have no friends, and no money. I can't get away." He sobbed like a child. Cram was a coward at heart.

"Don't be a d——d fool!" Tom replied. "No snivelling! Look here! If you'll strike hands with me, I'll protect you till you can get away with a good stake, and get you off, too. Is it a bargain? I want you to do something for me. Will you do it?"

"What is it?" the clerk nervously asked.

"Never mind! Trust in me. I'll tell you soon enough. You don't want to go away empty-handed. Those fellows have too much money."

"Then it's a go!" Cram cried.

"Go, it is!" said Tom. "Now, give Morton this note quietly to-morrow. I want him to meet me at the Insurance Club. I don't want to run against those other fellows, if they're all fighting."

The sworn allies separated, both well pleased.

Morton, his eyes steeled to indifference, was in a happy mood next day, when he received his note. For in the passionate blandishments of Marie Ashton he had buried, at night, all the cares of an unhappy day. Having dropped into his double life, he wore the golden yoke lightly, and could logically demonstrate to his own heart that, if all turned against him, Marie Ashton would be worth wife and friends to him. The subtle philter of unholy love had poisoned every vein.

"I've got money enough. I suppose old Wise will always coddle Claire." He forgot that he had himself drifted into the power of others. In Marie's twining arms he had told her all the troubles of the day. She was safe and unmolested—and there were no further newspaper allusions. One blessing!

A telegram from his wife arrived with good news. A despatch from Morris announced that the crew were all gone, and the yacht would leave next day. "Good! Now for Overton! I suppose old Seth went out last night to see Claire. I don't believe he would blow. But as for that sneak Burnham, I'll watch him."

And Morton, self-deluded, repaired to the Club, and in a long conference unfolded the whole case to his Mentor.

Overton said: "I presume you will continue the banking business alone?"

"Oh, certainly! I'll gather up Wise's reserved capital,

and pay him clear out by December 1st. The other man drops out then. There will be no shock, as our depositors will not withdraw their funds. I will realize on my surplus securities and quietly settle with these men, letting them go out. But, should there be any more publicity about this yacht accident, you must call on my wife with me, and you can swear you were aboard the Fantine. I have refused to explain to any one but her. She's very reasonable. I can tell her our business was confidential."

"Certainly, my dear Morton! Now, I don't want to meet these men. I'm off to Washington for a few days. Here's my address there. Use the wire if you want me. I'll send a note or despatch to you marked 'private,' if I wish to meet you here at the Club when I come back."

The allies clasped hands. Overton casually remarked: "I am getting my Western matters well in hand. By the way, don't let this nonsense keep you from looking in on Mrs. Ashton. You know I depend on you alone, when I'm gone."

"Certainly!" cried the delighted banker. "I'll do so. I must be off." His heart bounded in happiness. Overton was blind. Yes, blind as the deadly summer rattlesnake.

As Morton departed, he said to himself, with glee: "I'll see Claire to-morrow. I can run out in the afternoon. Then, Saturday, I'll work the 'Boston train' dodge." His eyes glazed in a luscious day-dream. To linger at Marie Ashton's side for two whole days—ah! Paradise. Heaven on earth was in his grasp.

Overton, finishing the bottle of Pommery, mused in the private room: "I think I let him have his rope. Marie will keep him blind. I have this cowardly Abel in my power, and I'll gather in all that surplus capital for old Wise, when ready. I'll make Cram watch it."

Running up in great good-humor to his lovely ward

for an hour's chat, he found her admiring a pair of superb diamond bangles, fit for a bright particular star of the Four Hundred.

"Where did you get those, Kate?" he genially asked.

"From a friend, sir," the Witch mockingly replied, as she flashed them before his eyes.

"Keep him up to this. It's a good idea," the gambler growled. "I never saw a woman who had diamonds enough. You are all the same. Now, you will not see me till Tuesday. I have some important business."

Marie smiled derisively as she said adieu at the door.

"Is it poker?"—she maliciously teased him.

"Better than that," he grinned.

"Then it must be good!" the siren laughed.

"It is. Good for you and good for me!"

Lighting his cigar, he wandered away happy.

"Cram," said Morton, at the close of business on Friday, "I'm going to Boston to-morrow. I'll not be down till noon, Monday. You can notify Mr. Wise and Mr. Burnham. Burnham will open the vaults." For Abel was now the chief medium of communication between the warring associates. All was quiet, but an undefined sense of impending change hung over the hitherto prosperous house. The anxious employees feared the future. Morton was calm, yet shaken in his secret soul,

Old Seth Wise, returning from his visit to Claire, had taken Morton aside and begged him to retrace his steps. He spoke kindly.

"I have not alarmed Claire. It is not a family break-up. I shall let it make no change with her. She shall have a solid fortune from me. But I don't want to lose you, my boy. I don't know what cloud has come between you and Ralph. You are both young and passionate. Get out of this false position. Tell me all. Rely on me. Let me smooth all over."

"I cannot," Morton stubbornly replied. "Burnham's insults would demand blood from another man. I can't get him out, without dissolving the firm. Now, you know I have seen Claire. She is better. She has no questions to ask," Morton earnestly said.

"True," said the mournful old capitalist, "she asks no questions, but her heart is sadly torn. I'll leave you now, my boy. Think this over." Poor old Seth turned away with moist eyes. He grieved to see the great firm broken up. Even in his folly, Morton was touched. He communed with his hopes and fears.

"I can't go back—I will not give up Marie. She is my life and soul," Morton soliloquized. "I'll square the dear old boy by and by. Marie will be here all winter, and next summer I can get her out in some quiet nest."

The fever of love was madly throbbing in his veins. In the dim future he saw no shadows of parting from the bewitching, lithe-limbed, white-armed devil who was dragging him down.

"Going to Boston! Well, I think I'll have an eye on you, Mr. Morton. Bank closes at noon," Cram murmured, as he closed the office door.

"I take the one-thirty train, Cram," Morton remarked —saying: "You can telephone to the Grand Central Hotel for me, up to that time. I'll look in as I pass by."

Saturday morning, at half-past eleven, Morton cheerfully, with a bounding heart, left the bank. Whirling to his house, he made the usual preparations for travel, having sent his now daily tribute of rare flowers to waken, with their royal fragrance, thoughts he could not frame in even a happy lover's eloquence. His toilet was rich for travel, but it eminently suited his mood. Gayly rattling up to the station, he lingered at the Grand Central for news. Nothing!

Passing into the depot, he obtained a Boston ticket,

and, as he entered the parlor car, failed to note Abel Cram slouching into the smoker.

Away sped the train. Morton's ardent heart was beating with impatience. A couple of stations up the road, he quietly stepped from the train. Casting his eyes about, he saw no one he knew. Still, a hundred yards away, his back turned, Abel Cram was idly walking away from him. Two or three dilapidated cabs lingered near. Stepping into one, Morton, by a roundabout way, approached the haven where the queen of his wild love awaited him. At a discreet distance, the sly clerk followed, with careful directions to his driver.

As Morton dismissed the driver, he hastened up the dark stairway—the entrance to his Paradise.

Abel Cram had noted the doorway, and was already sauntering to it. As he passed it, with a keen upward glance he saw a dark-eyed, snappy, shifty-looking young woman passing out. Her eyes met his with a peculiar glance. Cram decided to take a risk.

"I beg pardon," he said, raising his hat. "Did you see a gentleman in dark clothes just go up-stairs? He had an overcoat and portmanteau."

"What if I did?" she said, queerly eying the clerk, and walking away from the door.

"I think he dropped something," Abel said. "I wish to return it." He was keeping pace as she walked along. Her eye was inviting: "Come around the corner with me." When the corner was turned, she wheeled sharply: "You are lying to me. You are spotting that man. Is there money in it?" Her eyes were greedy. Cram held out a five-dollar bill.

She laughed mockingly. "When you show up five hundred, I'll tell you what I know." Abel, without a word, left Viola Pomeroy. He was nonplussed.

While Morton, dallying in foolish security, plunged into every wild extravagance of passion, his sultana alter-

nately exciting and chilling him, Abel Cram, from an improvised coign of vantage, watched the house till Monday morning. Several times he saw Morton emerge for a brief promenade. On Sunday night, in the moonlight, the banker swiftly walked a block away to a waiting carriage. "I'll bet she comes now!" cried Abel. In five minutes, Marie Ashton swept down the stair. As she glided to the carriage, Abel Cram saw, for the first time, the golden hair and lovely face, the sculptured form and queenly beauty, of the Witch of Harlem.

As the carriage rolled away, he boldly rang the janitor's bell. That functionary appeared, and eyed him keenly. Cram was fairly shabby.

"Whom do you wish to see?" the janitor said, giving Abel a poor man's send off in his pompous insolence.

"I want to see the tall blonde lady who lives here—the handsome lady. I had her card. I have lost it. I want to show her some pet dogs. I want to know when I can bring them."

"Oh! Mrs. Ashton—second floor flat. She's just gone out. Come again, young man," he grumbled away to his pipe and mug.

Cram lingered around till the loving and happy couple returned. The lights went out at midnight.

Abel wandered homewards, proudly muttering: "I've got him planted safe, now!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HOME AGAIN. VIOLA POMEROY'S SUCCESSFUL NOVEL. FACE TO FACE. MORTON AT BAY. A FAMILY CRISIS.

Four weeks fled away. Days of alternated passionate joys and weary waiting for Harry Morton! The cold aversion in the firm continued. All the outlying

capital was drawn in under joint direction of Wise and Morton, for the approaching liquidation. Burnham held quietly aloof. Morton and Ralph ceased to speak.

"Don't you fret," old Seth Wise privately said to Burnham. "I'll set you up, Ralph, in a good brokerage office, and back you with capital. Only, have no further quarrel with Morton. Make no scene in the bank. This is for Claire's sake. I can give her money, but, as she truly loves Morton, I cannot rebuild the shattered home, if we precipitate any family trouble." Burnham acknowledged the justice of this, while pining to see Claire—all the more, that her house was now forbidden him.

Claire Morton was at home again. Home again! But her delicate face was shaded with a haunting sorrow. Morton was all courtesy, even tender. He had dismissed and royally paid the suave Doctor Atkinson—*once* for his professional skill, and *again* for his silence. The subject of the moonlight wreck was dropped.

Morton was assiduous in his attentions. Yet he could not disguise wholly the reason of Ralph Burnham's absence. Old Seth Wise looked gravely mysterious on his visits. Morton was forced to finally admit to his wife the intended change. "I have had serious trouble with Burnham," he vaguely said. "I have had enough of him. I'm not tied to him."

"Harry," Claire cried, throwing herself in his arms, "tell me all. I fear some dreadful thing has happened. Trust me! You know how I love you."

Morton shivered in self-abasement, yet almost roughly cast her off, saying: "You women are all such fools about business."

Claire was fain to be silent. Her only sorrow of this passing time was the regular weekly visits to Boston, the long absences from Saturday morning to Monday night, for Morton went directly to the bank from Har-

lem. He took a local train for Forty-second Street, to keep up his double existence, arriving as if really from the "Hub."

Grown bolder, stolen afternoon visits during the week were gradually added to the wild ecstasies of his weekly sojourn. Sinking deeper into the gulf—even more madly enslaved by his sultana—he lived only in the hours when he was at her feet, or encircled with the clinging white arms, loaded now with his gems and bawbles. She was bought with a high price.

Peace reigned in his mind as to the threatened exposure. The yacht, in commission, had returned, and no one lurked around crew or commander. No news from his enemy, the blackmail reporter!

"My decided bluff frightened off that scoundrel. I'll never hear from him," the banker flattered himself. And yet, in the clear sky over his head lurked the bolt ready to shatter his last hopes in life.

Overton had returned, and discreetly counselled his friend the banker. Abel—keeping his Harlem discovery to himself—informed the gambler of the progress of business, and the amassing of funds for the final settlement.

"What do they do with this great surplus?" Overton asked.

"Oh! we buy in United States bonds, on a favorable turn, for account of old Seth Wise. When all is liquidated, I suppose he'll register them, and put them in some dark hole of a safe deposit. I have an idea he may back Ralph Burnham in a new business. But the bank will go on the same. Morton has a great name as a financier."

Marie Ashton, though loaded with Morton's rich offerings, began to chafe under her comparative isolation. She tired of the unending adulation of the man whose ardent physical nature was aflame with the passions she inspired. Action, travel, new faces, new lands, new loves,

new lovers—even safety, peace, and distance—she craved. The Delilah of Harlem was no mere odalisque.

"Patience, mad fairy!" Overton would reply to her murmuring. "Keep Morton hoodwinked a little longer. I will take you where the great world will be at your feet. I am nearly ready." But Marie Ashton chafed.

Her blue eyes blazed, as her shapely foot beat time to her complaints: "I am tired of this idle life. Get me out of it."

Burnham had never gained a clew to the lost beauty of his dreams. Even Walter Maxwell—roving over the town—in theatre and café, in park and drive, was unable to solve the mystery. That austere intellect—Mrs. Selina Francis—was fain also to conclude that the vanished Mrs. Marie Ashton was in Europe, or in the far South.

Abel Cram, having verified more than one weekly hegira to Harlem—*via* "Boston"—now feared his employer less.

"If I can only see Wise and Burnham out of the firm, Morton would not dare punish me, even if he did find me out."

But Cram's brain ached, as he racked it daily, to find a safe way to pass his shortages over the settlement. "I must trust to Overton," he sadly concluded.

It was in early November that, with keen eyes, Abel was scanning the casual customers, and watching the routine of morning business. A young woman entered and offered for sale a bond of small denomination. Casually called to the negotiation, Abel recognized the young woman who had spurned his five-dollar bill. "She does not know me," he thought, with a slight flutter of the nerves.

The hawk-eyed woman soon undeceived him. As she received the money for the bond, she passed him a slip of paper on which she had been figuring.

He read: "Follow me out. I must speak to you." She was gone without a word.

Taking his hat, Cram sauntered out. On a near corner, the harpy was waiting for him. Turning into a dark entry as he joined her, she said: "Now, I want you to do me a favor, Mr. Abel Cram!" He started.

"How do you know my name?" he faltered.

"I know all about your firm. I want you to give a letter to Mr. Seth Wise privately. I must see him at once," she said sharply.

"And if I do not?" Abel retorted.

"I have those behind me who will serve you out if you don't. You are spotting your master, Mr. Henry Morton! He would kick you out of doors in a minute if he knew. Now, do as I say, and you won't be harmed. Here's the letter. Will he be down soon?"

"Yes," Abel answered meekly. Her nerve was stronger than his. "I'll do it. I won't be involved?"

"You can simply say I left it with you. I know all of you by sight. I've watched your place a week. Now, I will wait for him as I have written. If he asks about me, be sure to say I am a respectable, ladylike person." She maliciously plumed herself as she spoke.

Cram entered the office, and finding Seth Wise arrived, handed him the letter, retiring at once. In five minutes Seth's bell rang.

"Mr. Cram, do you know the woman who left this letter?" Seth asked, his face flushed. His eyes were searching Abel's face.

"No, sir! She was a ladylike, youngish person. Looked like a clerk or literary woman."

"That will do, Cram." Seth was in a brown study.

Abel escaped, not too hastily. "This means business," the clerk muttered.

Seth Wise passed out, with a few words to Morton. The old man had slipped a pistol in his pocket, and, as

he passed the cashier, drew a check and folded some large notes away in his pocket.

His brow was stern. The old man sighed as he hailed a cab and gave the order : " Drive up to the Eden Musée." A dozen times did he read the brief note. " This is very serious," he muttered. The letter was plainly and well written, in a woman's hand :

NEW YORK, *November* 8, 1889.

MR. SETH WISE,
Morton, Burnham & Co.,
Bankers and Brokers,
New York City.

SIR : I am aware of your relationship to Mrs. Claire Morton. I am also aware that you have large funds in your firm under the management of Mr. Henry Morton. It is imperative for your money interests and your family honor that you should know the fullest details of Mr. Henry Morton's East River adventure. He is lavishing thousands on a worthless woman—and the proofs, history, and whole details can be had for a proper consideration. Meet me at the Eden Musée at once. I will come up and speak to you. Come alone, for you will be carefully watched. After our interview, you will have my full name and address.

A FRIEND OF JUSTICE.

While Seth Wise chafed over this, he was forced to admit that the Eden Musée was a safe and respectable place. " There's nothing can happen to me there," said he. " What devilish thing is to be told ? Poor Claire ! "

While he drove along, in a Sixth Avenue restaurant, in a private room, Ed. Haggerty, the reporter, sat at table with the snappy-eyed Viola Pomeroy.

They were exchanging the last words before their joint campaign opened.

" Ed., you've traced out clearly every point. You're a wonder ! " the woman admiringly said. " I am sure we have got the subject thoroughly explored. Now is the time to strike. We must have money to marry." Her eyes sparkled.

"And I have sworn revenge on that proud fool who pushed me out of his servants' door." Haggerty's round ugly eyes gleamed with hatred as he spoke.

"Pshaw! Ed., what's revenge worth? Nothing. We want a trip to Europe together—you and I. This will be a big stroke for us. Now, I'm off! Follow me, watch for him, and only join me if I make a sign. When he gets the truth, he won't rage. He is sure to protect his favorite niece. You say she is his darling."

"I've got the whole family history from their servants and the stablemen. The old man rolls in money," Ed. replied. "Now go! Make it five thousand—not a cent less—and offer the proof at once. One thousand down!"

"All right!" And Viola Pomeroy passed out to meet Seth Wise, as he entered the door of the Musée. She was fairly presentable in manner and dress. Seth Wise was astonished, as this prepossessing woman stepped up, saying frankly, "Mr. Seth Wise!"

"That is my name, madam," said the old banker.

"Let us sit down here, where we can be unheard," the woman calmly said, as she noted Haggerty, in fair range, examining the rather ghastly trophies of art.

"I will proceed to business," she said, in a voice low, but distinctly audible to the agitated old man. "I will not talk of your firm, friends or family to distress you. I will only say that I know every detail of these matters. If you wish to verify it, ask me any question you wish."

The old man nodded, "Go on!"

"Henry Morton is a demented fool. He is crazy over a woman who is ruining him body and soul. As to his being a scoundrel, I leave that for you and his innocent wife to say. I have lived nearly two months in the same house where he keeps this woman in a royal nest. I have watched him and have every hour of his visits and detail of his actions clearly set down here." She drew out a business-like document.

"Go on," the old man fiercely said.

"He left his sick wife to languish alone and has been haunting these rooms with that infamous woman, every moment he could steal away. His Boston trips are a lie and a sham. He has been watched for over six weeks, as he would leave the train, a few miles out, and steal back to her house—remaining there till Monday morning."

"By God! what a rascal!" Seth hissed out. "Is this true?"

"True as Gospel," she firmly said. "I have a copy of this document. If we agree, you can take this with you. Now, as to the wreck of the yacht in the East River. He took this dame out for a moonlight adventure. They were accidentally wrecked. He saved her by a mere chance. He spent that whole night at her rooms, and you know the affair nearly killed his wife. The man is in the room here now who wrote that article, and he can give you proofs you can't resist. Moreover, he will go with you and face Morton, if you wish it. We have also the cab-driver who took the lovers to her house. I will now, Mr. Wise, tell you that I will put you face to face with Henry Morton, in her rooms, on his next visit, if you wish."

"What do you want?" Wise asked, his lips trembling with rage. "Be brief."

"I am handling this as a simple business matter. I'll give you the whole papers. I'll furnish you the man! He will go with you and serve you till you have finished this affair. We will prevent all further publicity, and destroy all the proofs. I want five thousand dollars—one thousand cash down, and the other four when you are fully satisfied. I know you wish to protect your business interests, and spare your niece a life of agony. I'll walk around the room two or three times. Make up your mind. You shall have my name and address. I will give you every proof of my respectability."

She was gone, leaving Seth Wise astounded. In a few minutes, he motioned to her. "Call the man here. It's a bargain!" he said, in a dry, hard voice.

"I'll take the thousand first," Viola Pomeroy quietly remarked. "You'll have the man in a minute."

"There's your money," said Wise. She quietly counted it, and handed him the desired paper.

In a moment Haggerty was seated by Wise.

"Is what this woman has told me true?" Wise asked with stern accents. He had now a man to deal with.

"Every word," said Haggerty quietly. "I'll prove it!"

"Then I want you. I'll pay you outside of this bargain. Can you come with me now?" Wise asked.

"Yes," the reporter answered.

"Then we will go at once. I want you to watch Morton—from the moment he leaves the bank till he returns—until I've done with your services. You can stay at my house."

"All right! I'm ready," said Haggerty.

Viola Pomeroy quietly gave Seth Wise a card, with her name and new address, for she designed a change of rooms.

Calmly holding out the crisp bills to Haggerty, the woman made ready to go.

"Keep it," said the chivalric Ned. "I can trust you."

Seth Wise handed her his house address. "If I want you, come there at once."

The strollers in the Musée were in ignorance of these business-like transactions, carried on among the grinning wax figures. Many a delicate affair has been adjusted there.

"Drive to my house," cried Wise, as, without a word, he unrolled the document. He read the title, and his rage grew with every word;

THE WRECK OF THE FANTINE: AN EAST RIVER MYSTERY.

A Novel.

BY VIOLA POMEROY.

"What's this nonsense?" the old man asked.

"We were going to publish it in the Sunday journals," Haggerty artfully said. "It would have been quite successful."

"I think it's very successful as it is," growled the old banker. "Now, Haggerty," said he, "I'm going to tell my butler to take good care of you. Here's some money. I'll come up-town with Morton to-night, and you can watch his house till he starts for the bank. If he don't leave his house by ten o'clock, then come back and turn in. The butler will open for you. I'm a bachelor."

Leaving Haggerty installed, Seth Wise drove to the bank. "I will take the important money matters of the bank out of this young fool's hands. But I must trap him first. I'll bring his wife face to face with this blonde she-devil!" Wise snorted over the description of Marie Ashton's charms, which Haggerty gave him. Her name, locality, and the last details were reserved until the visit to the spider's parlor, which Seth proposed, with Haggerty as his pilot.

Locking the successful novel in his private safe, Seth Wise set himself to play the *rôle* of spy upon the man whose fortune she had builded up for years.

Seth Wise sat for days afterward, heart sick, in his private rooms at the office. Around him lay shattered the ruins of a life-time work of loving kindness. From time to time, he exchanged a few necessary words with Morton on business affairs. Seth had schooled himself to make no sign of his agony and distrust.

Morton was frequently absent for an hour in the day

on his now regular conferences with Overton. The sly gambler decided not to risk his own great business scheme by too many visits to the bank, or becoming entangled in this bitter quarrel, daily growing more acrimonious.

He moved his shifting bank account by messengers through Riley's brokers, for even the old Boniface dabbled in Wall Street. The New York stock craze rages in all ranks!

Burnham frequently examined Overton's very active account. "Quite a large account, Cram," he remarked one day.

"Oh! he's a sly one, is Mr. Overton," said the clerk. "He is on two or three sides of stocks, and works here through many different brokers."

"He seems to make good winnings," replied Burnham.

"So he does. He has evidently inside tips," Cram listlessly answered.

Burnham turned away. He knew not that these handsome deposits were often Morton's lavish money gifts to Marie Ashton, given with the foolish hope of exciting her to wilder caresses—to a more unrestrained loosening of her passions. To gratify her every whim, to feel the power of his money, in casting it at her feet, was a feverish whim of the banker lover.

Before the evening shadows began to fall from Old Trinity's spire, Seth Wise had read every line of Viola Pomeroy's narrative. It appalled him. He carefully pocketed it for reference.

"Now, what can I do? I can't make this dreadful scandal public. I don't dare to tell Burnham. I can watch all the routine business. My own money (Claire's future endowment) is safe. I don't want to ruin this poor young fool; I cannot hope to buy this blonde woman devil off. Claire shall not be a subject of public pity as a cast-off wife—a broken-hearted *divorcée*. He has basely lied to

her, to Burnham, and to me. He keeps up this nonsense —this criminal double life—in spite of all. What a fool! I think I'll use shame and fear. Claire has a little spirit. I will bring her face to face with this siren. It must be done! Exposed and baffled, his Boston trips impossible, Morton will have to obey his wife and me. Detection would ruin his future business. I suppose the woman has already robbed him of enough to change her station on, without great regret. Morton will be in my power. If Claire then shows her nerve, he will fear to make a public scandal. She will never let him go free, to please this devilish adventuress. And the poor boy may get over his madness! Well! I'll pin him down to-night," grimly ejaculated old Seth.

It was time for departure from the bank. The great vault doors swung to, after the day's harvest, and the huge books were all safe behind the steel lockwork—a marvel of ingenuity.

Flanagan, the night-watchman, with club, lantern, and pistol, was ready to mount guard. A faithful old retainer—a gallant veteran soldier!

Morton left his office, snapping his latched door. Seth laid his hand on his arm.

"I'll drive you up home, Morton. I won't be here to-morrow. I have a few things to say to you."

"Will not to-morrow night do? I can call at your house," Morton replied. "I have a social engagement up-town."

"By no means!" said Seth, with authority.

Morton was fain to yield. In the long drive up-town, Wise disposed of several current open matters of grave moment. He artfully brought up the subject of the wreck, the quarrel, the newspaper scandal, and the future of the young man before him.

Stolidly, coldly, and artfully, Harry Morton lied, and nailed the door upon his past honorable life.

As they neared Morton's house, Seth gravely said: "Henry, I wish you to carefully weigh all your reasons for breaking up this prosperous firm—for denying your wife her cousin's friendship—and for leaving me helpless between three people I love, whose interests are all dearer to me than my own. I am getting an old man now, my boy." He spoke almost fondly.

Morton defiantly remarked: "I hope you will remember that I am not dependent." This was a stab at Burnham. "I have not flattered you. My position has been made intolerable by Burnham. I am done with him forever. You are free to continue your interest in my wife's welfare. He is not—not till I'm dead!" he said savagely. "Then I propose to cherish Claire while I live, and manifest my love at my death," Wise retorted with a bitter energy which astonished Morton. "And on that score, I shall consult you no longer. Good-night, sir!" Old Seth Wise threw his head up like a lion at bay, as Morton, without a word beyond "good-night," entered his house.

"Home!" cried Wise. As the horses sprang away, he vowed to give Henry Morton a shock which would shatter his palace of sin around him.

"No pity now! It must be done," he growled.

"Riley," said Overton, as they sat, a day or two later, plotting the impending departure, "do you know a good safe place in Brooklyn where I could remove the lady and our personal goods—on the instant if needed? I'll keep my little camp here with you."

"Just the place! A friend of mine! I'll go over myself to-morrow and see him. It's handy to the wharf, and at a pinch the tug could take her from there, or you from here, day or night, to the schooner."

"Good! Attend to that!" Overton said. "Now, I want a couple of U. S. passports if we go in those strange

lands. How can I work that? I am anxious about that —about the names."

"Aisy, me boy!" cried Riley, with his occasional brogue. "I'm solid at the Court House. The boys in the Passport and Naturalization Bureau have them left over by people who don't call. I'll pick up a couple, and you can give me a general description that would half-way suit the lady. I can fix you out. Ye're not particular about yer new name. Anything will do for those fellows, there."

"Glorious!" cried Overton. "I will move the lady over, on pretence of going South for a couple of weeks, quietly to your friend's house. Now, Thanksgiving Day is Saturday. The bank will close from Friday afternoon till Monday morning. That gives us Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights to work. I will clear out six or eight days before, and I'll leave my papers and tin box (he chuckled), of immense value, in the vault, but I'll draw my cash account down to a few hundred dollars. You can make a deposit of a few hundreds to my credit after I go. I have a man in Leadville who will send a business despatch in my name. They will never suspect me. I have the whole thing solid now, for I have a man who's got to do the trick, and be the suspected party."

Overton paused, and took a deep draught.

"Tom, ye're a wonder! Ye should have been a leading professional instead of a dribbling amatoor. Ye'd have made a great fortune."

"Yes, and landed in Sing Sing! I am safe in working by my wits," Overton growled.

"Well, anyway, ye're a daisy!" said Riley, proud of his friend. "Don't ye want some help?"

"Not a bit, except a trusty hack-driver. I don't know such a one."

"I've your man. He's one of our own wharf gang," Riley joyfully cried.

"Then I'm all safe," Overton replied. "I'll be ready to see Oliviera, in two or three days, with you. But I hardly know what to do with my man—the fellow who does the job."

"D'ye want him dropped in?" Riley huskily whispered, afraid of his own words—indicating the bay with his thumb.

"No, you fool! He must live, to be suspected," Overton replied.

"Suicide faked up, with a letter—we could fix him in an out-of-the-way place," Riley persisted. "Dead min don't talk, ye know."

"The police would get at it," Overton thoughtfully said.

"Carry him off wid you and fix him at sea. They'd think he ran away," Riley ingeniously suggested.

"That might do! We'll think it over," said Tom, as he strolled off to meet Abel and look in on Marie.

Overton, learning from Cram of the almost final purchases of the bonds to replace Seth Wise's capital, said carelessly, as they chatted: "I suppose your cash reserve has been greatly increased?"

"Almost doubled," Abel replied. "Morton is smart. He knows our depositors will flurry a little at this change, and he will be ready, December 1st, to meet all runs. The money will all flow back in a few days. Oh, he's smart!"

"Some of it won't," Overton gleefully thought.

"I am nervous and anxious about those books," Abel said. "They might call me down any minute."

"Pooh! don't fret. I'll see you through. I'll be where you can act in a minute," Overton said, as they took their last glass. "Don't lose your nerve, man!"

Long sitting in colloquy, that night, Tom and the Witch of Harlem settled every point of mutual interest. "Be ready to act, at a moment's notice. Night or day,

keep ready to move. Is that fool coming here next Saturday?" the gambler asked, with a gleam of discontent.

"Yes," she said, as she dropped her eyes. She was not entirely shameless.

"Keep him then on the rack. Get him half-wild, if you can. Make him drink. By the way, Kate, if he has any little presents to throw around, make your hay while the sun shines."

"Why?" she faltered.

"Because his trip after the next will be the last he makes 'to Boston'—and we—we will be on the high seas," the gambler retorted. "I won't trust my luck too long here."

"Leave me, Tom," she cried. "I am tired. It's all right. I'll do as you wish." As Overton disappeared, she drank half a tumbler of *crême de menthe* and threw herself on the divan. Even her iron nerves were shaken.

Saturday morning, the bank was crowded with its rush of short-day customers. Seth Wise, wary and calm, watched Morton, as one who gazes on the condemned man going stolidly to his doom.

"It must be," he mentally decided. "It is his moral death-blow. Poor fool! Poor fool!"

"Mr. Cram," Wise said, stepping to the factotum, "give me five thousand dollars in large notes"—handing over his personal check.

Seth looked grimly at the package of bills in his office, as Cram closed the door. "Four thousand for the successful novel—one thousand more to buy that scoundrel Haggerty's silence!" he growled. "I don't mind it. It's not the money. It is the villany."

For Haggerty had well and truly played his ignoble part. Viola Pomeroy was summoned early next day to Seth Wise's house, to surrender the retained copy of the "novel," and receive her blood money.

Twelve o'clock closed the ebb and flow of money at the bank over the counters. Old Seth prayed to God, with ashy lips, in his office, that Morton would, by some chance, forego his usual trip to the "harem in Harlem."

Alas! no. As old Banker Wise locked his private door, Morton, umbrella, wrap, and portmanteau in hand, said: "I'll be here at noon, Monday, Mr. Wise."

"Do you go out of town?" Seth asked, almost humbly.

"I am going to Boston. I am closing out all my interests there to meet this change. I take the Elevated." And he went out, with a cold nod.

Wise leisurely walked out of the bank, his head bowed in deep thought.

"It must be. So, then, let it be. I will not see Claire ruined and despised. I'll tame this boy's pride yet."

Seth wise, sitting at his lonely board in his old family mansion, said to his butler, when his luncheon was finished: "Is Haggerty below?"

"Yes, sir. He has been here all day writing," the servant replied.

Haggerty's nimble brain was really busied in fabricating picked-up items for the Sunday journals—flotsam and jetsam of broadcast social gossip.

"Send him up, Sharp," Wise directed.

"Haggerty," said the old man, as the scribe appeared, "dress yourself quietly, so as to attract no attention. Get your pistol." The reporter nodded. "Get up to Marie Ashton's house. Stay there till Morton comes. Be prudent. Is there a telegraph office near?"

The scribe nodded.

"Send me a despatch when he comes, 'All right,' if Morton arrives. If he leaves the place, telegraph that. If he comes back, do the same. Sign with some assumed name. Now, I will come there at nine o'clock exactly, and bring a lady in a carriage. Tell me the corner to stop at,

and meet me. I shall have two trusty men with me, on the box. You are to go quietly up-stairs, and tell the colored girl you must see the lady for a moment. We will then follow you. All you have to do is keep the door open. I will be responsible after that. Make no mistake about Morton being there."

"All right, sir," Haggerty said. "And the money?" he asked, in a cold business-like way.

"It is all on my person—with an excellent revolver. My second man will guard the hallway below. If you have told the truth, your money is safe."

Seth Wise was soon left alone. He paced the room excitedly till his dinner-time. The expected despatch came at four o'clock—"All right.—H." Ordering his closed carriage for dinner-time, Seth studied the address given to him by Ed. Haggerty. All the final details were to be revealed after the discovery.

"I will prepare the little woman," old Seth reasoned out. "I'll send her a note telling her I will dine with her."

In half an hour, the acceptance was returned.

Seth was strangely distrait during the duet dinner. Claire watched in wonder his gloomy preoccupation. At eight o'clock, the bell rang. A note was handed to the old banker by the watchful valet. "The carriage is at the door, sir," the serving-man reported.

"Stay with it—I may need you," Wise replied. "Claire," he said, when they were alone, "it is a heavenly night. You are too much in the house. I have to take a drive up to the Park to see a young person who is ill—the daughter of an old friend. Come with me, my child. The ride will do you good."

In ten minutes the steady, swift trot of a splendid team was rapidly bearing them to the appointed rendezvous. Seth Wise's heart beat rapidly.

"It is cruel, but it is the only way to open her eyes."

It seemed an age until the carriage stopped at the corner indicated. The valet opened the door. He had his orders. As Wise and Claire alighted, Haggerty advanced and whispered a word to the watchful old man.

Steadily up the stair of the apartment house—Haggerty in advance—the three moved. Wise's face was ashy pale. His thin lips were sternly compressed.

At the first turn, Haggerty whispered, "Here we are," and then calmly pressed the electric button.

As the startled Fanny turned to deliver Haggerty's message, the undaunted scribe inserted his foot in the door left ajar. Brushing him aside, Seth Wise, his eyes flaming, led Claire boldly into the parlor. There, amid all the *débris* of a rich feast *à deux*, with every abandon of guilty lovers at their ease, sat Marie Ashton, in her richest robes, displaying to the utmost her matchless charms. Harry Morton, wine-flushed and maudlin, was lying at her side. The frightened negro Fanny fled, only to be drawn into her own room roughly by Haggerty, who now guarded the outside door.

Morton, with staring eyes, sprang to his feet, rushing forward, in drunken fury.

"What is this?" he yelled, as his wife, Claire Morton, tottered, falling prone with a broken scream:

"My God! Harry! Oh! my God!"

It was the foolish husband's arms which laid her on the rich divan, where Marie Ashton queened it while lying in wait for her prey.

"Stay, madam," harshly commanded Wise, as he grasped the jewelled wrists of the handsome Witch of Harlem as she rose.

"Coward!" she hissed, "let me go."

"I will let you go," Wise snarled. "You will go far from here, and soon. In the meantime, look at your work, you she-devil!"

Morton, half-crazed, burning rage in his heart, with trembling hands sought, among the costly flowers and the gleaming wine-flasks of the table, vainly for a carafe of cold water to dash on the brow of the lifeless woman.

"Let her alone, you brute!" Wise shouted to the frenzied man. "I will take her to the only home she will ever have."

While the moaning woman faintly opened her eyes and gazed at the three, Wise proceeded, with cold energy:

"Yes, Mr. Henry Morton, your trips to 'Boston' are at an end. If your harlot, here, is in New York to-morrow night, I'll see her landed on Blackwell's Island. You need not rage," he sternly said.

Marie Ashton dropped easily in a chair and coldly eyed the prostrate woman and her own foolish lover at bay—wife and light o' love face to face!

"Take me away, Uncle Seth! Take me away!" Claire moaned, trying to rise. She fell back. Henry Morton sprang to her side. His wife waved him off, with a wild gesture of unutterable disgust, and dropped senseless.

Morton turned angrily on Wise. "Leave the room. Leave my wife to me," he cried, rushing at old Seth.

Wise cried, "Not a step, sir!" Calling briskly, he was instantly joined by Haggerty, who had locked the frantic colored girl in her room.

"Haggerty, just watch that man," said Wise, indicating Morton as he toiled to bring Claire to her senses.

Alert and erect, his hand on his pistol, Haggerty quietly said: "Good-evening, Mr. Morton! How did you like the little article?" Morton quivered in a speechless rage. He dared not speak.

"Madam, have you taken any more swimming lessons?" the scribe flippantly remarked to Marie Ashton, who was now standing idly, mute, and coldly eying the different members of the excited group.

In a few minutes Claire Morton was able to sit up. "Take me away, Uncle Seth!" she feebly whispered.

"I will, my own dear child!" Wise said, with growing tenderness. "First, I want you to know what this man's love and devotion amount to. Speak up now, Haggerty."

Haggerty coldly said: "I helped to bring this woman, Mrs. Marie Ashton, from the wreck of the Fantine here to this house. This man and I carried her up the stair to this very room, where he spent the whole night. For the last two months and over, he has been at least for two days of every week an inmate of these rooms. I have every day, date, and detail recorded, and good witnesses."

"Betrayed! You coward cur!" Morton dashed madly at Haggerty.

"Move an inch further, and I'll scatter your brains over the floor." The reporter's pistol was pointing fairly between Morton's eyes.

"Enough!" Wise said. "Come, my darling!" as he raised Claire. Marie Ashton had sprung between the two younger men. Her statuesque beauty was a luring beacon of sin.

Turning at the door, old Seth Wise said, in a chilling voice, to the baffled Witch of Harlem: "You had better leave this city quickly."

To Harry Morton, with a withering sneer, he cried: "You poor, lying fool, I will leave you here in your sty. You had better live at your club after this, if you can tear yourself away from this 'lady,'" he said, with a sneer. "I shall occupy your own house with my niece until you can come to your senses, or are properly landed in an insane asylum. Don't you dare to speak to me at the bank, unless I address you." And the old man and the fainting woman were gone. Haggerty acted as a rear-guard. A family crisis in the Four Hundred!

CHAPTER IX.

A BROKEN IDOL. JOSÉ OLIVIERA'S SHIPPING VENTURE. ABEL CRAM'S DILEMMA. A WALL STREET BANK ROBBERY.

PLACING Claire in the carriage, Wise directed his wondering valet to go down-town alone. "Haggerty, you take the box seat," he ordered. "Drive steadily," he cried, as the door closed.

Not a hint of the social tragedy annoyed the other denizens of the apartment house. Humanity ebbs and flows, a ceaseless river, through the crowded caravansaries of New York, in nomadic knots. Joining, mingling, severing, mating and unmating—for good or evil—these human tides flow in and out, from the social poles of the winter "season," to the torrid zones of reckless summer.

Poor Claire Morton, her aching head resting on her old uncle's shoulder, sobbed wildly. "Oh, my Harry! My God! my husband!"

Seth soothed her, without wasting words. For her idol was broken. Her eyes were at last opened. In mournful silence, the party reached Morton's deserted home.

Seth earnestly begged Claire to restrain herself, and enter her own home calmly. "Rouse your pride, my dear child. I will go to my house and return thence on foot. Let me see you at once when I return. I shall stay near you to-night."

"I will do all you wish. You are all I have now, Uncle Seth," the suffering woman whispered.

So, leaving her to await him, Seth drove to his home. He signed to Haggerty to enter with him.

In his library, he now counted out the four thousand dollars, without a word to Haggerty. "Tell me all?" he sternly said.

In a half-hour, Seth knew every reserved detail. Haggerty had the rare prudence to make no comment.

"Can you stay here a couple of weeks with me?" Wise said.

"Certainly!" answered the overjoyed reporter, whose successful revenge was deliciously sweet. He had seen proud Harry Morton humbled beyond his wildest dream.

"Here's something extra for you," Wise said, handing him a roll of bills. Haggerty's politeness caused him to pocket the added thousand without looking at it. "Go to the Club quickly, watch Morton, and see who goes with him, if he leaves. Report at seven to-morrow morning to me at Mr. Morton's house. Have no affray with Morton—on your peril! Keep a strict silence as to this whole affair."

Haggerty bowed his head, and was away like a shot.

Seated with Claire in her boudoir, as the clock struck eleven, Seth finished his well-considered advice to the deserted wife.

"You can do nothing now. Leave Morton to me. I'll see him to-morrow. There must be no open scandal. You know all the truth you need to. Hear his whole story, and then decide what to do. But do nothing in haste—nothing at all, without first consulting me. You are my own child now." The old man laid his hand solemnly on her head.

"But Harry! Harry!" she pleaded. "He will do something desperate."

"Not at all," said the old man. "Shame will keep him quiet. He must hold up his head and finish his affairs. He will get out of this craze by and by, and you and he must decide on a future. Better that he should be cured at the expense of his vanity and this sorrow, than go on to utter ruin."

"Ah! she is so beautiful—so lovely!" Claire moaned.

"Damn her loveliness!" roared the old man. "Don't you cry your eyes out. He is simply a foolish fellow. I'll send you and him off to Europe for a year. You'll forget all this nonsense yet."

"Uncle Seth," she said proudly, her pale face flushing, "it is all over. We can never be the same again."

"We will see—we will see," said the old man cheerfully, as he hobbled to his room.

"Poor child! poor child!" mused the veteran banker, as he dropped into the sleep of exhaustion.

When Marie Ashton and Morton were left alone in her bower, he paced the room excitedly for five minutes. In a harsh, dry voice he said: "What can we do now?"

Marie Ashton's lip curled. "If you have any conception of the ruin you have brought on me, go down and telegraph to this address, at once. Stay!" she said. "Send a carriage to bring Overton instantly. Here's a note."

She dashed off a few words to her "guardian."

Come at once. Imminent danger.—MARIE.

"Come back to me here," she imperiously said. He darted down the stair.

She waited till his foot died away. Springing to Fanny's room, she released the frightened negro.

"Pack everything up, you black fool!" she sternly said. "Don't wait an instant for sleep. Overton will throw you out of the window, I fear."

The girl's teeth chattered as she flew to her work. Several previous flittings, like this, returned to her mind.

Marie Ashton was sullen and moody. Her lover was helpless—he seemed pusillanimous and wretchedly feeble in her eyes now.

"I suppose he will sacrifice me to-day, with a man's cowardly selfishness!" She longed now for Tom Over-

ton's ready wit. Securing her money and jewels, she smiled as she gazed on her treasures. Here was wealth. "Not empty-handed—and Tom has a round sum of cash in the bank."

Morton hastily drained a glass of brandy. He lit a cigar and gazed out of the window.

"What shall I do?" he hazarded.

"Are you going to your club?" Marie asked, with faintly disguised scorn.

"Yes, it is better. I would rather explain to Overton there. Then I will send him back here when I am done with him."

Marie coldly said: "I think you had better go now."

"What will you do, Marie?" Morton pleadingly said.

A lightning thought crossed her mind. "I'll find out how careful he is of his money. He shall pay for his folly."

"I don't know," she slowly answered. "Your mad imprudence has ruined me. Of course, it won't hurt *you*," she reflectively said. "The woman always suffers —but—I only hope Overton won't meet that old fiend who dragged your wife in here. There will be murder if he does. Overton is no coward!"

"For God's sake! no violence," Morton pleaded, as he dropped on his knees by her side. "It would ruin you, him, me, and all of us. Listen, Marie! I wish you would go over to Brooklyn. I am sure nothing will be said in public. Old Wise dotes on my wife. He will keep quiet for her sake. He has this spy fellow in his pay. I will give you money. Get out of here at once. Go over to Brooklyn. I will tell Overton it's all a blackmail scheme to force me out of the banking firm. He will believe it. You can make him believe it. For God's sake! don't leave me. It would kill me."

"Your wife," she murmured, half-relenting.

"Let old Wise cover her with his millions—I have

enough. If she leaves me, I'll marry you. I must be prudent till I settle with these people. I can see you quietly. I'll tell Overton there has been no complication. After all, nothing is really known."

"And you would really marry me?" she murmured, the old velvety softness in her voice.

"I'd bless the day," he cried, clasping her to his breast. He at least was true to his darling sin.

"Harry," she said, fixing her splendid eyes on him, "I'll trust you. I have two years yet of my probation. Make me independent of Overton's anger, and I will stay near you."

"What do you wish?" he huskily cried.

"I leave that to you. I am not exacting. But I must be independent. Now, I am thinking of your interests. Go to the club. Think this all over. I will lead Overton up to receive your explanation. I leave here before nine o'clock."

"But how shall I meet you? Where? I wish to show you I feel how I have tied your hands, my poor darling! You shall not suffer."

Marie returned his caresses—the old madness swept into his brain.

Kissing his brow lightly, she whispered: "I will send you a messenger to the bank who will guide you to me. Not even Overton will know—no one, but you and I," she cried, throwing herself in his arms.

Morton was enraptured. "My life! my soul!" the excited man murmured, as her kisses burned his lips into a new fever. "Wait," he whispered, "wait till I see you again!"

"Now go," she cried, leading him to the door. "I fear for both of us."

With a madman's cunning, he gained his club by a circuitous route, leaving orders to have any visitors shown up.

Five minutes after his departure, Overton entered Marie's room. Pacing the floor, he listened to Marie Ashton's recital. She quivered in her heart, lest some brutal outbreak might prove to her that she was only a slave to a human fiend. Overton sat down at the table and smiled. "This folly makes our fortune. Have a fresh bottle of wine opened, and listen to me. At nine o'clock, you will leave here. I'll send for you. You have money?"

She smiled. "Plenty, Tom!"

"Good! The party I send will drive you over the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry to me. I'll put you in a swell Brooklyn hotel and keep away from you for a day or so. I will have a safe retreat provided later. Let Morton know where you are. He will steal in and see you. Then, while this hubbub goes on, we will clear out, when I have finished my little business."

He whispered a word or two in her ear. A strange devilish smile dawned on her face. "I see it all now. I'm really tired. Let me rest. It's all right."

"You'll hear from me, three or four times a day. Don't go out an instant. You're a regular genius for tangling a man up. I'll make you rich!"

He was gone.

Marie Ashton calmly threw open the windows, and studied the stars while the frightened maid cleared up the *débris* of the luckless feast.

"These rich New York fools!" she murmured. "They all think they can play with fire, unscathed. The first new face—some budding beauty, some nameless stranger—would chase any loving woman from their cold and narrow hearts. Pride, vanity, luxury, excitement, all this devil's whirlpool they swim in, bear them away into some new eddy. I wonder what Morton really means. Is it love? Nonsense, passion, a strange craze, or weakness? What will he do for me to-morrow?"

And again she calmly slept on her field of battle, victory perching on the rosy flag of Venus.

Morton impatiently awaited Overton at his club. He had his story ready. It was midnight when Overton entered. His brow was serious but his manner friendly.

"This is a bad business, Morton," he exclaimed. In five minutes the anxious explanations of the banker were over. Tom paced the room, sipping his wine reflectively.

"I am very sorry this has happened. I naturally shall remove my personal account till you are alone in business. I would not trust myself to see that old dog Wise. He and this Burnham have some scheme to force you to your utter ruin. Look out for them. Now I must go to Denver in a few days. I shall probably take Mrs. Ashton south, and leave her there for a month or two. I'll leave a little money in the bank to meet any odds and ends, but I can't stand by and see her insulted. The man who annoys her will suffer. The man who attacks her dies!" He brought his fist down with energy on the table. "I know you mean well, Morton. You have no right to protect her, but I have, and I'll do it. Now, do you keep cool. This family flare-up will cool down. These things always do. Bless you! there's a dozen stories I know worse than this. Keep cool. Don't let them bluff you. Why, if they proceed to extremities, they can't prove a thing against you. I have too much confidence in Marie Ashton to believe a breath against her. I feel my responsibility, as I know you acted for me, and by my wishes. I can't tell my business to every one. If Wise stirs your wife up to attack you, tell them plainly to see your lawyer. That will stop off both Burnham and Uncle Wise. As for your good wife, you can explain reasonably to her, and make her see matters in the right light. Be patient. Meet me at the Insurance Club at noon. I'll draw out my money to-morrow.

Now, good-night! This business has agitated me very much. I must prepare to move Mrs. Ashton early."

"You'll give her new address to me, Overton!" said the banker, clasping his hand warmly.

"I'll give it to you the day after to-morrow. Hold! I had better let you wait till we can go over there together. We'll meet here at noon every day till I leave. It will save appearances. I prefer not to enter the bank."

Overton gravely departed.

"It's not so very bad, after all," Morton meditated, as he threw himself, half-undressed, on his bed. "All I have to do now is to talk Claire over. As for Wise and Burnham, I'll punish them yet." And he fell asleep, grinding his teeth. Poor fool!

When Morton entered the bank next day, Seth Wise, with grave face, endeavored to open conversation with him. Standing with his back to the closed door of his sanctum, Morton remarked: "Mr. Wise, you can see my private lawyer when you wish to. As for my wife, I will attend to my own family matters. I believe that is all, sir!" And Seth Wise—the victor—passed out, nonplussed and heavy-hearted.

The bank was quiet. All moved on as usual. "The clerks don't dare to talk too much," bitterly thought Morton. And then the heated blood surged to his brain, as his heart asked him, "When will Marie's messenger come?"

He left the bank, taking some of his private securities, and returned in an hour with a package of twenty thousand dollars in new currency. "She shall never suffer, I swear!"

Precisely the same oath, Marie Ashton was swearing on her own account, in the violet velvet private parlors of her new nest in Brooklyn's greatest hostelry. "I think I may safely send for him now," she mused—for Overton, with approving smile, had said:

"Keep Morton on the string, while I attend to our business."

Morton—loving and beloved—was only too ready to entangle himself deeper in the toils. Those witching eyes, the clinging white arms, and the fair witch's passionate kisses, were they not worth the whole world? It seemed so.

Harry Morton entered the bank next day with a triumphant smile on his face. There was a look of stern resolve on his sharply cut, nervous features. For he was acting on the line of offensive-defensive tactics laid out for him by Overton.

"Wonderful man that!" Morton mused.

As he enjoyed his cigar he reviewed the field of battle. "Burnham does not dare make a move. His guns are all spiked. Seth is now afraid of his own work. As for Claire, she begins to see where her own interests lie!"

For he had boldly entered his own house the evening before. Claire met him with composure in their own rooms.

There was no sign of any social upheaval as Morton passed up the staircase in the home of luxury to meet his now indignant wife. Excited but resolved, his brain was fired with the necessity of self-protection, and of seeing the blonde queen of his heart once more.

Claire's lips were firmly compressed. Her dark eyes were angrily flashing, although her manner was outwardly calm. In the smart set, these little *mauvais quarts d'heure* occur, even when the reporter of the daily "Universe" cannot get all the details on the spot.

Morton said quietly: "I will rejoin you in a few moments."

Retiring to his rooms, his nimble valet readjusted his costume. Descending, he rang for the butler, and, over an apollinaris, decided that the servants knew nothing. The house was in its normal condition. With an affected

nonchalance, he rejoined his wife. As he climbed the stair, he quietly said to himself: "This delay is a damper to the shock of my return. Yet she has no tears, and wears an ominous face. I fear it is war. Thank God! the servants know nothing."

"Now I'm ready to talk this matter over with you," Morton said, as he made himself comfortable.

"And what have you to say?" burst out Claire Morton. Her bosom was heaving. Her dark eyes flashed lightning. Her nervous strides up and down the room betokened suppressed passion. Morton was reclining on a Persian couch.

"Nothing," he said calmly, as he drew out a cigar. "You will permit me!"

Claire sternly said, as she dropped into a chair, "I wish to know all about the 'Boston train,' your mysterious trips, your 'urgent business.'"

"She don't know all she would have me believe she does," mused Morton, looking at Claire from under a cloud of smoke. "I have nothing especial to say," he slowly answered.

"I know this!" Claire cried, springing wildly to her feet. "You are one of a thousand married men in New York. You all lead double lives. The wife, lonely at home—the sultana dreams in luxury, in Brooklyn—in Harlem—or in Jersey City. And you all have 'business' to keep you away from home." Her voice rang shrill in its scorn.

"Don't arouse the servants," Morton coldly said. "They are our masters, you know. Do you want to get your name in the newspapers?" Claire winced.

"I will know all about that woman, about your deceiving me. I will leave you forever, if you cannot explain this thing." Her eyes were filled with bitter tears. She rocked herself to and fro. The salt tears slowly trickled through her hands.

"She's weakening," said Morton to himself, as he gazed calmly on her suffering. "It's rough, but I've got to do it."

"Harry, I have been a good wife to you. You must know that I can never live with you again. You have made me the scorn of New York. You have broken my heart. I'll not stand it," Claire shrieked as she wildly walked the spacious room. "I will leave you forever. This is my house. Go to your hidden beauty—but do not come here daily with lies on your lips."

A battle of bitter words raged for half an hour. The sad culmination of a marriage *à la mode!*

Furtively watching the passionate woman, Morton said to himself: "This scene must stop. She'll be soon in hysterics."

"Now, have you said all you can?" he calmly remarked, as the exhausted woman threw herself in a huge chair. "Listen to me. You have gently reminded me that this is your house. I can leave it. Well, I will leave it—and you—forever. You are a fool in business. Don't make yourself a termagant at home. We are not leading a baby existence, here, in New York. You are not fit to hear anything further now. I will not speak till you are reasonable. I have a devil's fight, at the bank, on my hands."

He paused; the sobbing woman suddenly lifted her head.

"What do you New York women care for?" he hotly said. "We can lie and steal and toil, we can break our hearts and rack our brains, to keep you silken-clad idlers in golden luxury. I am tired of it all."

He followed up with this telling point: "Old Seth Wise makes my life a hell. He fills your ears with childish gossip. I toil—he takes the greatest share of my earnings. Every day, you—your interests, your future, your wishes—are dinned into my ears. And now,

you tell me this is your own house. So it is. You can live in it—alone! I will leave it forever."

Stopping in his nervous march before her, he said: "Madam, marriage is a two-edged sword. I will tell you something. While I bear the whole burden, that smooth-faced fool Burnham lolls around you with his flattery, or drags down at noon to draw money enough to send you rich presents. He flatters old Wise. He hangs around you like a lapdog. I am tired of it. I have held my peace. I don't care to throw away my future, my record here, my life. But, thank God! I've got some little money of my own. You can live in your own house, and have your uncle and Mr. Ralph Burnham break up our home."

Claire was now crying softly in abject weakness.

"I will leave our home to you. If you can stand the publicity, the social disgrace, the scandal, you shall take the responsibility, by heavens! You know what divorced women are in New York—every man's prey. Go ahead! Join the sisterhood!"

"Oh! Harry, you will break my heart," Claire murmured.

"You have already broken mine," he bitterly said. "But it's all right now. I am the master here yet." He thought of the meeting with Marie. "Listen to me. Be reasonable," he said, seating himself at her side. "I do not wish to further alarm or annoy you. There will be a time when I can explain all to you. I will say nothing of the efforts of others to ruin my business interests and to part us. I will give you just a week to think these matters over. There is not a bit of proof that I have wronged you. That I innocently deceived you, is true. I will only tell you that I have had a trust of honor, affecting another. I have moved secretly to get money reserves together to pay Seth Wise out. I must be master of this situation, or go to ruin as a financial

leader. Ralph Burnham, I will get rid of at any cost. Old Seth will grumble, and come into the traces in a few months. I don't object to you seeing him, and listening to his garbled reports of me and my doings. It is only just that no other man should poison your mind against me. The seal of silence will be broken in a few weeks."

He spoke with seeming frankness. Flickering faith lighted again its fires in Claire's breast. She stretched her loving arms out to him. "Come back to your home, my husband. No one knows of our trouble yet. Uncle Seth will keep quiet for my sake."

Showering Judas kisses upon her pale lips, Morton pressed her to his breast. He could feel the two soft packages of money—a small fortune—destined for the lovely Witch of Harlem.

The old, old fashion! To the end of the world, the current of lying intrigue and dissimulation divides men and women in the active or passive combat of love and marriage.

Catching at these straws, the poor wife was fain to believe him and be happy even under the storm clouds.

So it was that, from his own home next day, Morton quietly wended his way to the bank—a victor in one field.

As he reflected in his office, he decided on a bold stroke. Entering Seth Wise's rooms, he said coldly: "I have made a statement to my wife. I returned home at her request. I leave you free to see and advise her. I now wish to hasten the closing of our affairs. The time is drawing near. I shall give orders to have all the accounts ready on December 1st, and our employees to have their books ready for the experts. Do you approve? I want to part with clean hands, in business, anyway."

"Certainly," Wise sadly said. "Henry, you know I have every confidence in your mercantile honor. Do as you wish."

In five minutes the bank was in a flurry. The news

was spread by Abel Cram, who was sick at heart. The day of retribution was coming upon him. Tom Overton was the only hope—his only stay from prison.

"I'll see him to-night, before I lose my mind," mused the desperate chief clerk.

Before noon, Morton, his routine business done, was eagerly watching every footstep on the threshold. A smart messenger boy, entering furtively, handed him a plain-looking note. He tore it open. Its few words made his heart bound with wild delight. It read:

No. 257. Come right up. Second floor. The boy will show you the house. Burn this.—M. A.

With a smile he sauntered out. Marie's call to her arms! Not a word did he speak as he crossed the ferry. Reaching Brooklyn, he called a cab.

"Don't need it. 'Tain't so fur off," the boy quickly said.

Morton threw the boy the generous cab-fare. The messenger grinned. "The guvnor's on some little private snap," the freckled youth said. The boy was sad at a lost opportunity of blackmail—for it was the negro maid who had hired him, and paid him royally once. He had not seen the fair Delilah. "No good to pipe him off," the boy dejectedly admitted. "The woman's very fly!"

"There's your house," said the messenger, pointing to the entrance of a great hotel. He turned and rapidly disappeared, without a word.

The banker strolled in, and after a casual promenade through offices and a slight delay in the café-saloon, quietly ascended the stairs.

In a few moments, with triumphant smiles, he clasped the glowing siren to his arms.

"You see," she smiled, "nothing can divide us."

He drew her closer to his bosom. Rapidly recounting his evening conference with Overton, Morton said: "My

own darling, we must be always on our guard, when I come here with Overton. I have kept my faith. Here is something which will enable you to be independent of him, and yet be near me, if you will manage to control his suspicions. I will answer for myself. Here is twenty thousand dollars."

He placed the two packets in her hands. She wound her arms around him, and whispered words which made his heart throb with passion's utmost intensity.

Two hours later—the confident air of a king on his brow—Morton retraced his steps to the bank by the upper ferry.

"Overton must never know of this windfall," Marie Ashton murmured, as she surveyed her glowing face in the mirror. "I have now the basis of a campaign in Europe. I'll keep this money at my own disposal. Tom, I am out of your power now. I have been a bond slave too long. Now for freedom!"

And Marie Ashton dreamed of future happy days when the shadows of Tom Overton's desperate ventures would not make her start in affright.

Luxury, adulation, excitement, love, and lovers she must have. The royal years of womanhood were yet before her, but the chain of the black-hearted Overton—though lightly held—began to gall the aspiring Delilah.

"This is real power—this is the only power," she exulted, as, after careful reckoning, she divided and secreted the price of Harry Morton's crowning dishonor and her own infamy.

At the South Ferry haunt, Tom Overton, with Riley, awaited the conference with José Oliviera.

"It's all right, me boy. To-night at eight. José has a little shipping office down here, near there, in an ould junk-shop; he has a telegraph and telephone, an' messengers, an' all, for his dirty work—an' we're all on the dead quiet."

"Just right, Riley," said Overton. "I've got to see my lady and frighten that fool Cram a little, then I'm ready for action. Have you got the sandbag ready?"

"Here she is—an' she's a beauty," said Riley; "though why the divil the boys call it a sandbag, I don't know. This is a lead oilskin," he said, with an Irish bull.

Overton grasped the deadly tool Riley handed him. It was a piece of soft, thin lead-pipe, about two feet long and an inch in diameter, plugged at the ends and loosely filled with heavy shot. It was covered with an eelskin, and a strong leather thong for the wrist was knotted on one end securely.

"One of me sailor boys made that. A good crack with that on the head of a man with a soft hat, or bare-headed, and he'll never speak agin. It breaks and crushes the skull an' leaves no mark. Sure, the man stays demented anyway, if he don't die."

"Good!" said Tom, with a grim smile. "I'm off," and he wandered away to confer with Marie Ashton, see Cram, and await Oliviera.

In frantic fear, Abel Cram, when he escaped from the bank, related to the waiting gambler the dilemma in which the sudden order for an examination of the books placed him. "I've got to be all square and safe on Friday night, or clear out. If I don't, then State prison waits me. On Monday the experts will come in and work—side by side with us—till the first of the month, when they take all the books for a week. We'll then only keep daily blotters of cash and checks in and out until they are done. You must save me, for God's sake!" He clung to Tom.

"Don't be a fool, Cram. We will act Friday night. I'll have all ready. To-morrow night we'll stay here till we have all fixed. Are you still controlling the time-lock?"

"Yes, that's dead right," the clerk whispered.

"Then we're safe," cheerfully cried Overton. "Don't you drink too much. Keep up your nerves steady, though."

Cram was driven along like a leaf in the storm, and clung to the stronger villain with implicit faith.

At eight o'clock the office of José Oliviera, on South Street, was tenanted by its chief and the two conspirators.

José Oliviera, a small dark-skinned Spaniard of fifty, nervously pulled his long gray mustaches, and dallied with a Havana cigar, three sizes too large for him. Delicate in physique, with little twinkling gray eyes, he watched the other men like a cat, and carelessly twirled a huge emerald ring on his finger.

In his soft, cooing accents, he followed the neat exposition of the new trading venture. Around them, piles of old nautical books, obsolete marine instruments, musty charts and maps, and boxes of papers marked "J. O." (in a long series of numbered years) gave an air of humdrum respectability to the gloomy place.

Riley came now to the front as the speaker. The finest old Jamaica, French brandies, and José's priceless cigars decked a rusty-looking sideboard.

"All smuggled—here," softly remarked José, as he did the honors.

After an hour's conference, foxy José Oliviera lifted his head, his eyes sparkled, and his voice was as clear as that of a general.

"Gen'lemen, I now understan' you, ver' well. I have a the fastes' boat on de ocean, mia biga schooner Restless—sometime calla La Guayra—down a below. Ah! my fren'"—and he joyously prodded Riley, who winked—"I gotta cargo now for de Spanish main. I go my islands. I go a Truxillo—an' maybe Havana when a come back. She haul in the stream to-morrow night. She lay in da Lower Bay an' wait the last mail from New Orleans an' the despatches. I make a de clearance. I

give a the orders with my fren' Riley, an' he put you a party on board on his tug. She take a the boat out an' turn a loose. Nothing can a catch a the Restless when a past Barnegat. I have all the comfort for de lady. Now, Riley, I look a to you for the whole a thing. I keep a the boat ready till you say 'Go!' *Vamos!* All a right!" He paused and sparingly touched his three-star Hennessey.

The two Americans bowed.

"Now what a I get for the voyage? An' I take a de risk lose the boat. No insurance!" José spoke with the keen ring of avarice in his silky tones.

Riley and Overton hobnobbed in the dusky corner. In five minutes Riley said, his air of bar-room loaferism vanishing: "Ye'll have one-fifth of the job, José."

"Vera good! I am a satisfy. Now, my fren'," he said to Overton, "I trust da Mr. Riley. We old fren's and *buen amigos*. He make de whole bargain."

"That is right," said the deep-voiced gambler.

"Vera good! We all a done. The ship now at da order, Mr. Riley. Shall we a go now?" For José had the cunning indolence and weariness of detail of the natives of the luxurious Spanish main.

"Wait a minute," said Overton. "Riley," he began, "I'm all satisfied, but I don't exactly know what to do with this fool Cram. You suggested—at sea" (and his voice died into whispers)—"but" (resuming his ordinary tone) "I want to leave him stuck for the whole affair."

Riley grinned. "Go down and smoke a cigar on the sidewalk. I'll pump José alone. He's a divil for this kind of work. I'll pull the blinds down. Whin I raise them, you can come up. We'll be done then."

Overton anxiously paced the dark streets, stumbling over loose coils of rope, stray anchors, and abandoned capstans—*disjecta membra* of many old ships. He

watched eagerly until the bright light streamed from the windows once more.

A hellish look of triumph shone on Riley's battered face, as he opened the door to Tom.

"D'ye see this thing?" said Riley, holding out an innocent-looking package, like a half-pound of tea.

"Well?" Overton queried.

"This is the darn' *loco* weed thim ould Mexican Injins use for their funny work. It did the business for the Impress Carlotta an' poor old President Juarez. It can be put into a bath, or in soup, or in a chap's drink. Ye can kill him—or drive him slow mad—or ye make him a dazed fool for years. It takes away all the beggar's mimory. It's the divil's own stuff."

"And what will we do with it?" Overton asked, in a bewildered way.

"We'll fix your man Cram with this. I'm to boil this down for an hour. Then I'll fix three bottles—wan of rum, wan of brandy, and wan of good whiskey. It'll be three kinds—full power, half, and quarter. The wan will kill, the other make him loony forever, and the third will lay him out for two or three years. D'ye see?" And Riley grinned.

"I see now," said the gambler, the fires of hell gleaming in his eyes.

"Now, here's José's plan," said Riley. "Go through the whole business. We'll have yere lady on board all right. When the tug takes you two off, I'll go wid ye. We'll give the lad two or three drinks of No. 3. I'll keep that bottle, and we'll bring him back ashore when I cast ye off at the Hook. I'll just dump him off on the North River, somewhere, an' the police will find him an' run him in for a drunk. He's got to stan' the racket, an' we'll put some of the stolen stuff in his pocket."

"Will the drug keep him crazy for a couple of years, surely? Can we really trust it?" Tom asked nervously.

"I bet da life on a him," José quietly said. "I make da custom man an' da bad man sicka down below with him. I take da risk. He never fail. I go with Riley and see him fix a da medicine."

"Then we're all done," said Overton rising.

"I give a Mr. Riley to-morrow, one paper, an' tell a you all the thing you want a take for the trip, for a you an' da lady. He can a get all tha private goods. Nobody see you," said the thoughtful José, shaking hands over the nightcap.

"Now a! You do a the worka! Evera ten minutes I have news my *amigo* Riley. We have a all ready."

And the conclave of three dark birds of night broke up.

"Overton, that man's a smoky jewel, I'm thinkin'," said Riley, "an' he's dead square."

"Bravo! Riley," said Overton, his coolness now absolute on the eve of the great attempt. "As for Cram, if the thing don't work, I'll strip him and heave him overboard. They'll think he's got into some deadfall. There's many a man-jack goes that same way, here," said Riley, reflectively, "many a one."

"All right, old man!" said Tom, clapping him on the shoulder. "I would sooner he'd wander around and make a fool of himself. It will mystify the police."

"So it will, and be d——d to them," energetically cried Riley, who despised the whole M. P. force, save those particular roundsmen who threw all refractory customers out of his hotel, and clubbed them, or "ran them in," at his own royal will. Libations of his best drink, and handfuls of his best cigars rewarded them, as well as occasional liberal pecuniary reminders.

When the clocks struck high noon, Thomas Overton, with great gravity, conferred at the Insurance Club with Morton over his impending departure for Denver. There was a solemn air of almost fatherly gravity in Overton's

manner. His preparations for the real flight were all made now. Riley had busied himself with passports, supplies, and details. The tug was under control. The customs papers were issued for the trading voyage of the splendid yacht-built schooner Restless, lying now in the Lower Bay.

Gravely Overton inquired of all the details of the approaching liquidation. His own account had been drawn down to a mere trifling balance.

"I leave my securities under your personal care, Morton," he said, with friendly feeling. "I hope this will be my last trip out to Denver. I am quite tired of running out West. I will telegraph you privately, as we have agreed, for any personal matters. On the firm's business, for my account, I will despatch directly to the bank. Now I have a great deal to do, and we will now go over and see Mrs. Ashton. Our train leaves at 8.30."

Morton's heart was heavy within him. That very morning he had stolen over and, with Marie sobbing on his breast, had tasted the bitter sorrows of parting! Lovers' woes are heavy burdens.

"But you will soon come back to me, my queen, my darling, my own," Morton begged at her knees.

She promised, with false smiles shining through her easily controlled tears. "I must go south on my business, with Mr. Overton. I have no real excuse to stay. I cannot. But, as soon as he leaves for Denver, I will come back to you, dearest, at once. I can then find social excuses. I only care to keep him out of the way till you are settled in your affairs. But where shall I come to, Harry?" she asked eagerly.

"Come to the Hotel Royal, and register as you wish to. Use any name. Telegraph me. If Burnham should trace you, simply ignore him. Send a messenger, in the same way, for me."

With a heart almost bursting with anguish, Morton was forced to repeat a formal visit in the afternoon with Overton. Each of the three liars was a credit to the modern school of Satan, for Marie Ashton smiled graciously as Morton said, in final salutation: "I hope to meet you again, madam, on your return."

Overton's eyes gleamed, as the goddess murmured: "With pleasure."

For it was well understood that the jealous raid of Morton's wife had ended in a reconciliation.

As Harry Morton retraced his steps and sought his home, where Claire, half placated, waited him, he closed his eyes and dreamed of holding Marie Ashton once more to his ardent breast.

Fool and blind! Before his foot crossed his doorstep, Marie Ashton was ensconced in an obscure water-side hotel in Brooklyn, whence she was to brave fate, under the guidance of desperate Tom Overton, in strange far lands.

"It's not very fancy here, but in two more days we will be on the laughing blue water. You are much safer here than in the Fifth Avenue," he reassured her. "Now, wait for me. I'll come back."

It was near midnight that night when Overton, with a strangely preoccupied manner, entered her rooms once again. His brain was filled with busy plans. His heart's blood was curdled with blackest thoughts. All was now in readiness. He dared not lisp even to her the nameless deed. He deceived her craftily, as she did him. He had verified all his preparations. The hell-brew of José Oliviera was now ready. The needed supplies were all on board. And even Marie Ashton's plain travelling dresses were provided to disguise her transcendent loveliness as far as might be necessary.

"To-morrow night will be your last in New York for many years," Overton said, as he threw his tired form down on an easy lounge. "Think of anything you want

before I leave to-morrow, as I shall need to use every moment. When I see you again, it will be on the yacht. Riley will take you and the maid off on Friday. I'll be with you, Friday or Saturday night. Then, ho ! for the blue water," cried Overton, his old sailor days returning.

"Tom, for God's sake ! have a care what you do. Take no desperate risks." Marie was kneeling at his side.

"Oh, I'm all right ! The Devil takes care of his own. You're a good girl, Kate," he said, almost fondly. "You must trust in me. I'm dead game."

He was fool enough to think she was really solicitous for him. Alas ! for Overton's mental vision. It was her own liberty, her own jewels, her own private hoard, and the reversion of the joint capital which he had, in bulk, given her that she really feared for, for the gate of freedom was almost in sight.

"After all, they can't fix anything on me," Marie reflected, gazing on Overton, sleeping like a log on the lounge. "But public exposure !" She shuddered as she closed her deep-hued eyes in a heavy sleep.

Abel Cram, pacing up and down in his squalid room on the other side of the East River, whose bosom reflected myriads of twinkling stars, feared the coming daylight. He trembled at the sound of his own voice. He knew the desperate plan at last, in nearly all its skeleton.

"I dare not recoil. He would strangle me like a dog. It's liberty and riches, or prison and ignominy. I must go on to the end."

Thanksgiving Eve—crisp and clear. The sounds of the church bells rang in the thin air. Wall Street—Mammon's highway—was silent and deserted. The shadows dropped deeper over many giant fortresses of finance, with every slowly passing hour. Dusky shades crept around hallway and recessed door. From the

humble home to the millionnaire's gilded palace—all New York waited for its holiday.

Flanagan, the sturdy old watchman, sat bare-headed, by his little fire in the back room, from whence he could see every entrance of the bank, and watch its great closed steel vault doors. His dark lantern was beside him, its shade turned over the bright light. Pistol in pocket, and billy at hand, he watched over the locked treasures of the firm. The darkness deepened. The silence became more profound. A faint rumble of a passing carriage now and then roused him, as he dreamed of the days when he went to the front with the Sixty-Ninth.

"I'll have a real pleasant day to-morrow," he thought, "with the children around me."

While he half-slumbered, at the South Ferry docks the swift tug, the Faugh à Ballagh, lay, her bright fires gleaming, and a full head of steam on. She had been down the bay and had boarded the saucy schooner Restless, dancing now on the smooth waters of New York Bay, sheltered by Sandy Hook.

Mine host Riley—his burly form muffled beyond recognition—was swiftly pacing the short dock slip, at which the tug was moored. A slim, graceful form beside him, with an ever-red danger signal of a lighted cigar, was no other than Mr. José Oliviera, the swell Spanish shipping merchant, whose pet fast schooner now was ready for sea.

Passing loungers looked not their way, for, night and day, dozens of nimble tugs lie there, ready for instant service in any sudden emergency, or for quick trips promising an unusual profit. The conservative police of the street were genially sampling the holiday bowls of various water-front saloons. On this Thanksgiving Eve, all the wayfarers hurried blindly along, somewhere seeking for social recreation or friendly cheer.

"Will Tom never come?" muttered Riley, as the distant clock struck nine. "Can he have failed? Ah! he's never the man to fail. Maybe he's had tough luck."

While Riley fumed and José Oliviera's eyes gleamed like black diamonds—his cigar lighting up his great emerald ring with livid green flashes—as he nervously puffed the rich smoke away, Abel Cram, with a pallid face, tapped at the bank door of Morton, Burnham & Co. in Wall Street.

Around the corner, in the dark—not fifty yards away—a carriage with two muffled-up men on the box was standing in the gloom in the cold. Yet these men were eagerly straining every nerve.

A few yards behind Cram, with a step as light as a tiger-cat, Tom Overton moved as a haunting shadow. By a singular prevision of dampness, Overton wore heavy rubber overshoes. His tread was noiseless. Darting into a recess, the gambler concealed himself near the door, as Cram rattled at the bank door.

"Ah! it's you, Mr. Cram. Come in, sir," said old Flanagan. The watchman was not startled, for Abel Cram often came down for a paper, or on some evening bit of extra work. The great blue shades were pulled down over the front windows. The solid panelled inside shutters were fastened.

"It's a crisp night, sir," Flanagan cheerfully said.

"Yes! Pretty near Thanksgiving," replied Abel, starting at the cold sound of his own voice. "I wish to get some papers out of my desk, John," Cram quietly said, his nerve returning. "I'll not be very long."

"Shall I make you a light, sir?" the dutiful watchman asked, for only a glimmering gaslight in the back room lit up the bank, with its ponderous high desks broken up by their many curves and angles.

"Oh, no—I can easily find them," the head clerk answered. He busied himself at his drawer a moment.

"Flanagan, get me a couple of large sheets of wrapping paper and some twine to tie these things up," Cram slowly said.

"I have some in my closet," the unsuspecting man replied; and, taking a candle, he went to a little room in the rear of the bank.

Like an ominous black shadow, Tom Overton glided swiftly in at the open front door, and concealed himself near the narrow doorway through which the poor old watchman must return. In his hand a long flexible club was swinging. It was the leaden billy. As the porter came out—candle in one hand and holding the papers in the other—Overton, springing up, swung the murderous flexible club, and felled the unsuspecting old man with a mighty blow.

"Quick now!" whispered Tom. "Lock the front door." Cram sprang to it. "Now get his keys out of his pocket." It was instantly done. "Help me to drag him into that closet."

The senseless man was hauled in, and securely locked in the porter's locker. A loose handkerchief over his mouth, and a few turns of strong cord—binding his wrists—ended the cowardly work.

Overton now handed Cram the keys. "Now jump to the vault. Don't be flurried."

The supreme moment was at hand. Abel whispered, his voice thrilling Overton's marrow: "It's all right. The time-lock's good." And the two villains easily swung the oiled doors of the outer vault, betrayed by the time-lock.

"Now," whispered Overton, "work this combination." The cool arch-villain read off letter by letter and figure by figure. All was a dead silence. Their hearts beat like trip-hammers as the last turn was made, and, the knobs turning, laid the heaped-up riches of the bank at their mercy.

"Now, for God's sake! make haste," Overton hissed.

The outer doors were swung nearly to, and by the faint light of a half-opened slit in the dark-lantern, Overton dropped package after package of bonds and bills into the long rubber bags, which had been carried hidden in their loose heavy overcoats. In five minutes all the available treasure was in their grasp.

"Is this all the bonds?" Overton whispered.

"Yes," Abel answered huskily.

"And all the large currency?"

"All but the small change," the cringing thief cried.

"Swing the doors," Overton murmured. The combination was put on. "Now to the front! Did you get the lists of these bonds?"

"Yes, here's the two papers," Cram shiveringly said.

"Then turn off the time-lock for two or three days."

Cram's nervous fingers flew like lightning at the work. Swinging the great front doors, they neared the bank door—each with a loose overcoat covering the bags.

"Lock the front door," was Overton's last word, as he blew out the dark-lantern. The coast was clear. No sound! No passers-by! "Go first," Overton calmly said, as Cram quietly walked around the corner and entered the waiting carriage.

Overton, with devilish *sang-froid*, calmly followed a few paces after. The vehicle moved slowly till the nearest corner was turned, then the horses smartly trotted to the South Ferry pier. Without a word, the two thieves hastened on the tug. Riley and José intuitively sprang on board. The carriage was already blocks away.

Clang! went the little bell. The swift tug dashed out into the gloom. In the cabin, Riley, his face pale as ashes, looked at Overton, who was gloomily speechless. He silently pointed to the three bulky bags. José Oliviera, with a meaning smile, nodded to Abel. "My

amigo, your a friend vera tired. Take a now a good a drink. Make you feel *bueno.*"

Overton's eyes gleamed, as Abel greedily poured down his throat the generous glass handed him.

"Have a some, Mr. Overton," said José.

"No, thank you," said Tom, unscrewing a huge flask from a coat pocket. "I've got a little drop here, a friend gave me for good luck." Overton trusted no accomplices.

José smiled quietly, and Riley roared. Some hidden joke amused him.

The Faugh à Ballagh was now racing along for a man's life. She fairly leaped through the water. As the little steamer neared the Lower Bay, three red lights were hoisted at her flagstaff.

Abel Cram rose, tried to walk, and fell back staggering. "I guess I'm—" and his head fell. The three watchful friends laid him on a leather couch. His eyes were now glazed, and his hands tightly clinched.

"I guess he's sea-sick!" Riley remarked, with a quiet wink. "Did you get it all, Tom?" he said.

"All but the chicken feed," Overton replied.

"Any trouble?"

"Not a bit," Overton answered, lighting a cigar.

"And the watchman?" Riley looked serious.

Overton made the motion of a swift blow as he handed back to Riley his leaden life-preserver.

"By the way, I forgot something," said Tom, and he approached Abel, who was now senseless. Taking the bank door key and porter's keys from his pockets, he tossed them overboard from the little window.

"Hello there! Throw us a line," shouted the mate as the captain rounded the Faugh à Ballagh up beside a magnificent schooner. The sailors were already straining at the schooner's windlass. Overton, José, and Riley sprang aboard the pretty craft. The bundles were not forgotten. Cram was tumbled on board also.

Riley called out sharply: "Now, Captain, look lively. Get out your towlines." In five minutes the Restless, her great gleaming sails hoisted, was swiftly passing out into the open seaway, at the rate of ten miles an hour. Locked in the pantry room of the schooner, Abel Cram lay like a log.

One wild embrace told Marie Ashton the story, as she fled into the separate cabin, where, with her maid, she had lingered for hours. Her eagle eyes watched every move of the men around the table.

At the round table in the main cabin of the schooner, with every external aperture closed, Overton swiftly divided the plunder. Bonds and cash were piled up in five equal parts. José Oliviera—his face gleaming in triumph—replaced his own share in one of the bags. Riley, with a cheerful smile, concealed his in another.

Overton, with conscious pride, dropped two parts in his sack: one for Belle Marie—one for Tom.

"Now, gentlemen," said Overton, "here's the only lists of these bonds in existence—one for the bank, and one for old Wise. I will copy the numbers in my note-book, and destroy these." In five minutes it was done. He tore the originals to tatters. The fragments flew away on the night wind, tossed from the little window. "That fool lying there told me there were no others. They have all been charged up, and these two lists made to check up the registry. We have only one thing to do. Riley, take five or six hundred dollars of this money to stuff that poor fool's pockets. See that it gets there," he said, with a devil's laugh, in which all joined.

Riley made a selection.

"That's enough," he said; "we'll not throw away our hard-earned money." The three thieves laughed merrily.

And Marie Ashton's eyes and ears were the only witness of the loot of the bank. She called the negro maid to her side. "Watch them!" she whispered.

"Now for this last lot!" Abel Cram's share of the plunder was then divided equally among the three.

The tug bell rang loudly now for slowing down. The Restless was in fair seaway.

"We're getting out to sea." The two confederates rose.

"Ye're all right now, Tom," said Riley. "Ye're a shinin' jewel and a howly wonder. God bless ye!" cried the battered-faced thief.

"Don't forget to throw that fellow ashore, 'way up the North River," Overton said, as Cram was lugged off to the tug. His pockets had been carefully examined.

"Oh! he's done up for—forever. He'll be an idyit all his days," brutally answered Riley. "I'll have him stumbled over, and 'run in,' in an hour or two. We'll watch over him. If he shows an ugly sign—overboard he goes."

"I make a the good look at a him," cried José. "*Carajo!* he never talk any more."

"Well, here goes!" cried Overton, as his friends drained the last of his own flask, and clambered nimbly aboard the tug.

The dainty Restless, with every sail set, was now racing along like a great white-winged ocean-bird, past Sandy Hook.

The little tug puffed and strained to keep up. With a last yell, "He's all right!" Riley's voice died away as the tug dropped astern. Soon the tug's three red lights were lowered, and she faded in the darkness. And Marie Ashton was on blue water with a new fortune.

Overton glanced critically at the straining sails, took a look at the foam-wreaths dancing by. "Twelve knots, by heaven!" he cried, and, light-hearted, went below to embrace "Colorado Kate"—the mystic Delilah of Harlem.

His arm was round the fair woman's waist, as he called for a bottle of wine, to the success of the trip.

"Katie, my own brave girl! you're the only woman I ever knew worthy of me. You're a grand one. There's nearly one hundred and eighteen thousand dollars of Government bonds there, and sixty-five thousand almost in good Treasury notes. What do you say?"

"Now, the world is ours!"

The fair wanton on his knee laughed merrily, as he pledged: "Here's to Mr. Henry Morton. He's a d——d fool."

And out into the southern skies, waiting the rosy dawn gilding the bluest seas, the dashing Restless dashed away —her crew ignorant of their quest—with Claire Morton's fortune in the hands of her faithless husband's still more faithless mistress.

CHAPTER X.

THE INSPECTOR BAFFLED. THE CRUISE OF THE "RESTLESS." MAXWELL'S CLEW. MORTON'S GUEST.

"GOOD-MORNING! Mrs. Eleanor Laurence," gayly laughed Overton, as he awakened the lovely sleeper late next day in her cabin on the schooner. Overton had already made thorough acquaintance with the captain and his mates, whose own cabins were forward. The saucy schooner was tearing along near the Capes of the Delaware, with every sail set, and, staggering under her cloud of snowy canvas, she looked like a Queen's Cup winner.

Marie Ashton rubbed her eyes and laughed. "Am I not dreaming?"

"No, you are not. After I send you in your coffee, you'll see what a dainty sea-bird is bearing you on.

Then we'll have a sailor's breakfast. Meanwhile, look at that, and don't forget your new name."

Overton tossed her a full, properly made out U. S. passport in the name of Mrs. Eleanor Laurence. He handed her his own—"Robert Randall."

"These are our new names, good for foreign parts and the wilds, my dear," he said. "You must not be too affectionate in your manner, for you must meet the three officers this morning. They do not know our real intimacy. You can fondle me in private," Tom archly said. "We must not create any suspicions. You see, this boat has to return to New York in two or three months, after a trading round. Don't forget, now, and call me 'Overton.' Make that yellow fool understand this, also."

"All right, Robert," the blonde sea-queen merrily replied. "How did you get these official documents? They are invaluable."

"Money will do anything, nowadays," Tom profoundly remarked, with the air of a hereditary capitalist. "We only needed money."

"And now we have lots of it," merrily laughed Marie, as she held up a rosy finger. "Leave me a little while, Robert, and let Fanny dress me. I know I'll surely look like a nautical fright!" Overton smiled, as he disappeared, with a last warning admonition. His cup of joy was running over.

Two hours later, when Mrs. Eleanor Laurence was presented to Captain Jonas Skinner, the bronzed Yankee sailor said, as this lovely apparition graced the deck: "Madam, we'll surely have a lucky voyage." It was a true sailor's compliment.

"How delightful!" cried Marie, clapping her jewelled hands, as she surveyed the sapphire sea—the blue sky flecked here and there with feathery clouds, and looming far away the faint blue lines of the Capes of the Dela-

ware. A superb breeze filled all the great yacht's sails. Captain Jonas Skinner set out all the racing canvas which the splendid yacht schooner could stagger under. Flying along like a great white ocean bird, she tore through the sparkling blue at fifteen knots an hour. Jonas sat whistling merrily on his white quarter-deck.

"Madam," said Captain Jonas, with pardonable pride, "there's not a thing but an ocean greyhound could catch us now. I'll defy any craft bearing sticks and spreading sails to overhaul us."

Marie and her maid busied themselves in arranging a comfortable nook, while Captain Jonas called Mr. Robert Randall below for a business conversation. José's secret orders were usually opened off shore.

Skipper Jonas Skinner was a stalwart, hard-featured Yankee of forty-five, and every inch a sailor. For ten years he had always sailed José Oliviera's crack trader. Jonas was trusty as steel. His boyhood was spent on a fishing schooner; schooled as a lad in the romantic Spanish main, he roved and traded the blue Caribbean till, as commander, he became José Oliviera's right-hand man. Rumor credited him with a half-interest in the peerless Restless, which was the chosen craft for all the most desperate ventures of "Oliviera & Co.," that mysterious firm having secret relation with Cuban generals, Central American presidents, Key West smugglers, political refugees, and Latin revolutionists all over the Spanish main.

Over a glass of prime Jamaica, Jonas Skinner made known his private orders to his passenger. "There's my letter from Don José. I know you have a duplicate. Now, sir, the boat's yours, under these orders. I want your lady to feel this craft her home, and I'll race you down below Key West in nine days, if this wind holds. When we get down there I'll have another talk with you. If you want a little run through the islands, we'll

try and please the lady. So, shipmate, here's my hand. I see you're an old sailor."

"Oh, yes! I've been wet in blue water," the newly christened Robert Randall laughed. "I'm a little heavy, though, now, to reeve in your flag halliards. I could do it once."

Overton smiled in perfect self-satisfaction as he walked back to the quarter-deck. "What a racket there is in the bank to-day."

The cruel gambler never gave a thought to poor old Flanagan, lying with his skull crushed, and tied up like a dog in the porter's dark room. His flinty heart was not moved by the probable fate of wretched Abel Cram, wandering alone and demented in the streets of New York, under the baneful spell of that mysterious Aztec poison. "He won't squeal. Serves him right, the ass!" Overton chuckled.

With the easy manner of a man used to every foul intrigue of craft, treachery, or violence, Overton trifled on the sunny deck with beautiful Marie Ashton, whispering to her: "This is better than our old days of 'short commons' in Leadville, or a run of 'hard luck' at New Orleans."

Her flashing sapphire eyes, as blue as the dancing ripples they were borne away on, twinkled merrily, as she whispered: "Remember your dignity. We are now capitalists!"

Church bells were ringing in New York City as the relief watchman stepped up the bank steps on Thanksgiving morning.

"Poor old Flanagan, he's had a hard night. Well, he has his day at home," the substitute reflected. All was quiet. The doors firmly locked! In an instant, with his duplicate key he entered. Mystery! No Flanagan! Calling aloud, the day watchman obtained no reply.

With one sharp look around, he sprang and touched the hidden electric police-alarm button. "I'm thinking there's some devilment here." While waiting for the police, the three minutes seemed an age. All over the mystified man roved. No disturbance. No Flanagan!— "By the powers!" he cried, as the Sergeant and three policemen sprang up the steps. "Come in!" he cried. "There's been bad work here."

"Lock the door," cried the Sergeant. In a jiffy the police explored the place. No sign of any struggle. The vaults were locked. Only one door resisted them. The porter's room firmly locked! "Brandon!" cried the cool Sergeant, "get me an axe from the fire patrol. Call in the Captain. Send a cab instantly for Mr. Wise, Mr. Morton, and Mr. Burnham. Bring them here at once. Keep it all quiet. Send a good officer with each cab. Start out the cabs, and then bring me the axe."

In five minutes Brandon was back. The burly Sergeant made the hard-wood doors of the locked closets yield to his nervous blows. "He's in here!" he said. "Chop it down, quick. Brandon, get away for the ambulance, and wire the Captain to come here at once. Now, boys, get that door down. Peters, jump and get me a bottle of good brandy." He whispered a word: "The nearest square place."

In three minutes, poor unconscious Flanagan was laid on the soft padded lounge in Morton's office. The handkerchief gag was removed. A glass of brandy was soon forced into his mouth. He groaned and moaned in pain. "Leave his hands tied till the Captain comes."

In a half-hour a coterie of keen-eyed men were around the senseless sufferer. The Captain and surgeon looked gravely at each other when they were admitted.

"What's the matter?" said the Sergeant to his chief.

"Why, he's been sandbagged. I think his skull is

fractured," muttered the Captain, his finger on his lip. The surgeon was silently busied with the sufferer.

Seth Wise, awaking to the sound of early bells, meditated in peace! A jangle of his door-bell brought up the frightened butler with a stalwart policeman.

"Mr. Wise," said the officer, "your night-watchman in Wall Street has been assaulted. We fear that the bank has been robbed! Come at once! I have a cab here."

Old Seth bounded from his couch. In two minutes the *coupé* was whirling down town. "You sent out for Morton and Burnham?" Seth queried.

"Yes, sir!" was the laconic response. An hour found all the three members of the firm around the senseless man!

In charge of a detective and the police surgeon, poor Flanagan was borne away for his Thanksgiving in Bellevue.

"Send some sensible person up to his house," thoughtfully cried old Seth. "You go, O'Brien," he said to the day substitute. "Keep his family quiet. Here!" he handed O'Brien a large bill. "Give them that for Thanksgiving! Say the old man will be back soon. Had some business. I'll go up myself, by and by. Now, Mr. Morton, try and open these vaults!"

Morton, dazed, and unwilling to credit his eyes, approached the doors. "I suppose Cram set the time-lock for Monday morning," he murmured. "Send for Cram! Get him at once."

"Don't you know how it is set?" roared old Seth.

"I have only one combination of the inner doors. The other one is—you know where!"

"Captain! send a cab on the gallop for Cram," energetically said Seth Wise. "Not a word of this to a soul! No publicity, till I see the Inspector!" Morton gave Cram's address. While waiting, the police officials

examined the rooms. Not a leaf of paper seemed displaced.

Police Captain Prescott took Seth Wise aside in this long wait: "Mr. Wise! This thing has been worked from inside the bank!"

Seth bounded from his chair: "My God! You suspect——"

"*Nobody yet!*" said the cool Captain. "I have just sent for the Inspector! We will see. You will find some of your clerks involved in this!"

Seth Wise was gloomy. Morton kept silent, eying the whole assembly. Burnham quietly conversed with Wise, and watched Morton keenly.

In a half-hour the messengers returned: "Mr. Cram was not at home, and had not been at home since the morning bank hour of the day before!" Fugitive or thief—which was Abel?

The captain looked grave. "Better give me a good description of him, and I'll ring in a general alarm. He is the key to the mystery!"

Over Seth Wise's busy mind flashed the facts of the approaching heavy liquidation—the unusual cash reserves, the purchased bonds: the knowledge of this was alone possessed by Cram of all the trusted subordinates!

"He may have been murdered!" Seth slowly said.

The Captain's lip curled, as he walked to the window and lit a cigar. "Better let me send for my lock experts," he said. "We can't wait till Monday for that time-lock to run off!"

"It's a very good idea. Do it at once!" cried Seth Wise. The experts were telephoned for to report immediately at the police station.

A long half-hour elapsed. A bustle arose as the grave-faced Inspector finally entered, and was followed by the cunning smiths summoned by the Captain. In five minutes the experts reported: "Must blow the time-

locks off, sir." "Go ahead!" said the Inspector, as Seth Wise nodded. The Inspector's quick brain conned the whole story. "Sergeant, take this Abel Cram's description. Go and have all New York stations called up for news of any such man! Let the reports be sent here till I leave! Disperse that crowd of loungers!" For stragglers were gathering on the street.

In a half-hour the outer doors yielded to a series of explosions aimed at the time-locks!

The cashier, brought on a gallop, now entered the room. "Now, Mr. Hastings, you can tell us your status at close of bank hour," the Inspector said.

"Yes, sir," said the wondering official, his eyes wide open, as he surveyed the wreck of the outer doors.

"Mr. Morton, see if you can work the combination now," the Inspector calmly said, observing the inner doors intact.

With trembling hand, Morton turned the knobs! The doors at last swung free.

"All looks right, so far. There is no trouble in these locks," the manager said, with lingering hope in his voice.

The Inspector, stepping in, said: "All has been turned over here! Mr. Cashier, take out your books."

Under Seth's superintendence, fifteen minutes revealed the loss of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in U. S. bonds and one hundred and forty thousand dollars in currency! This amazed the little circle of the partners, the two gray-headed police chiefs, and even the impassive detectives who accompanied the Inspector.

"My God!" groaned Seth Wise. "Claire's fortune is gone!" Morton gazed as if in a horrid dream! The money destined for his wife's fortune had vanished.

Burnham's face was as sternly silent as a Roman bronze. "We must keep this robbery quiet," whispered Seth Wise. The nonplussed watchers gazed blankly at each other.

This mournful tableau was broken up by the arrival of a messenger. The Inspector handed Seth Wise a telegram.

BELLEVUE HOSPITAL.

A man answering your description was sent in here from West 125th Street Station at 1.30 last night. Mysterious case. Opium delirium—incipient tremens—or felonious assault with sandbag. Money on his person and private articles—no papers. Send detective up here at once.

JANEWAY,
Surgeon-in-Charge.

The Inspector called a detective: "Get up there at once. Send some one along who knows Cram well. You!"—he indicated the cashier. "Report by telegraph. Hasten."

"Gentlemen," said the Inspector to the gloomy members of the firm, "I will now go down to the station and send out some orders. You had better send for your lawyer and principal employees. While I am away, you can talk things over. The Captain will give you a proper guard." He briskly departed.

In low tones, the three partners, brought together now by calamity, were forced to confer.

"This must be kept as quiet as possible," Seth Wise said. "Let us drop our differences for a short time. We must admit only a small loss publicly. I will continue to sustain our credit. Let us put the whole thing in the Inspector's hands. This is clear: the time-lock has been tampered with, and the main doors not. There has been foul treachery and sly theft. But some one must have got at the combination in some mysterious way. Can you suspect any one?"

Morton hung his head. Burnham was silent.

"Let our usual business go on; we must repair this loss, or—or stand it," Seth energetically said. "We will search by every avenue for the plunder!"

The Inspector returned after a self-commune of an hour.

"It is really Abel Cram who lies in the hospital. He is utterly demented. The doctors are at a loss to explain. He was not reported drunk. He has no signs of an opium fiend. He has no marks of violence on him. His mind is utterly vacant, and he looks as if he had been poisoned. But he had a considerable sum of money with him. The cashier telegraphs he recognized one or two peculiar bills which he handled yesterday. Now, gentlemen, shall I take charge of this case? Of course, we will hold the clerk."

"Yes," all three answered in a breath.

"Will you announce a public reward?"

All shook their heads. Wise said: "Not yet. Search every corner of New York. Spare no pains or expense; but work silently."

"Then I'll trace every 'crook' of any note in New York last night. I'll watch over all the trains and steamers. I go now and see this half-crazy man myself. He has been a part of this—either thief, fool, or victim. The mystery hangs on him. But there has been other treachery also. This is not the work of regular criminals. It has been done in some way from the inside of this firm. I will report to you at my office to-morrow, Mr. Wise. I presume any one of the firm will do. By the way," and the stern Inspector nodded to Seth Wise, and they stepped out of the room a few moments. The Inspector eyed Wise keenly: "Are your young partners both square?" he whispered, as they went down the steps.

"Perfectly," Seth replied. "I'll stake my life on that."

"And also discreet?" the Inspector said, with a peculiar smile.

Old Seth was silent—he dared not tell all!

In two hours, to all appearance the bank was in its usual order. The junior partners and senior clerks

were all privately ordered to report Sunday for the re-arrangement of the wreck.

"Burnham, come to my house to-night," privately directed old Seth, as Ralph left.

Wise and Morton visited the wounded watchman. He was in a favorable state; but months would elapse (if he did recover) before he would be able to use his mind. His club, pistol, and lantern, found near him, proved that he had been completely surprised.

By the side of the bed of the staring-eyed Abel Cram, the two seniors were met again by a mystery. It was impossible to make him understand his grave situation. No thoroughfare!

After a gloomy parting from the younger men, Wise sought his lonely home. Harrry Morton, heavy-hearted, rejoined his wife. Burnham, with Maxwell by his side, discussed the affair till late. What hidden hand had struck this blow?

"I will go out of the firm December 1st. I have had enough," Ralph said; "I shall leave the country. I've lost all my profits. I have no capital left to repair this heavy blow. Wise and Morton can take over the business. I shall travel a year. I have thrown away my best years here, in this cursed Wall Street."

Walter Maxwell slowly said: "Ralph, it's your duty to stay and try to unravel this. You owe it to stanch old Wise. I believe there has been dark work very near you."

Ralph buried his face in his hands: "I'm tired of it all." The old refrain!

As Seth Wise mounted his mansion's broad steps, he thought of the sly Haggerty. "By Jove, I'll put him on the scent." After a hasty dinner, the old capitalist sat long in conference with the ferret-eyed scribe.

Ed. Haggerty was watchful and silent. After ten minutes, when Wise had finished his recital, the reporter

slowly said : "Give me a week now on this, Mr. Wise. Don't mention my name to the police or to either of your partners. I was going over to Europe with Viola Pomeroy to see life on the 'other side.' We proposed to marry on your money. But I'm going to get some more of it, if I can earn it here."

"What is your plan ?" Wise asked.

Haggerty calmly said : "Why, this thing will surely leak out. I will spread myself around the city. I'm free of the town. I may catch up a point. But I don't want to see you till I am done. You will all be watched."

"Very prudent," Wise growled. "Here's some money. Come in any night after ten. They will admit you."

"If you meet me outside, you are not to know me," said Haggerty.

"All right," remarked the worn-out banker.

And New York slept once more, while far away to the South the white-winged Restless was speeding along like an arrow shot from a bow.

Morton, tossing on his pillow, had an uneasy dream in which Overton, Marie, and Abel Cram were dragging him down into a gulf : "Fool!" he said in the morning, as he woke heavy-hearted, "they are all far away." A week rolled by. The mystery was greater than ever. Fugitive allusions to a robbery in Wall Street were laughed at by the police.

"Only a break-down of the locks, and they had to be forced. Such things occur in banks."

Morton breathed freer when, six days after Overton's "departure," a routine telegram on business was handed to him from Mr. Thomas Overton at Leadville.

The next day his heart beat wildly as he received a private telegram from "Mobile," signed "Marie A——," with the words : "Expect me soon ; all well." His heart beat high in hope.

A full letter from Overton arrived on the heels of the

telegram. The Denver man's return was delayed some weeks. He, of course, knew nothing of the robbery.

"Good!" Morton soliloquized. "He will be off my hands, when Marie comes."

And the days slipped by! The baffled Inspector could find no clew. Flanagan lingered on his bed of pain in superinduced brain-fever! Abel Cram's mind was a hopeless blank, but the examination of the books showed Cram a defaulter to nearly seven thousand dollars. Beyond the conclusion that the clerk was an accomplice or tool of the mysterious thieves, no advance to any solution seemed possible.

In three weeks, Burnham left the bank! His connection had ceased. It was without a word to Morton that he slipped over the threshold!

On the shoulders of Wise and Morton fell the labor of regulating the entangled affairs. Burnham steadily refused to take a dollar, as his share of the profits was more than engulfed by his proportional share of loss.

"Never mind, Ralph!" said Wise. "Here! go abroad a year! Here's a letter of credit for five thousand dollars. Come back then, and I'll give you a business of your own. But don't go away till I advise you. I may need your help here yet. I have a heavy load to carry in these affairs."

Burnham knew that silent old Seth Wise feared and distrusted the steadiness of the man he now was sole partner with. Haggerty, from time to time, reported. The same song, always, was heard, "No news!" He had traced up the surroundings of the watchman, his family, and all Abel Cram's antecedents. He gathered the half-whispered gossip of the town. The firm was now aware that the lists and numbers of the bonds were missing. "Cram must have known all," the Inspector gravely said, "to destroy these lists of the bond numbers, and he had skilful help."

While Morton hungered for the return of the white-armed siren, whose voluptuous charms haunted his sleep, and waited now in vain for letters from Overton, an order came in from a city broker for Overton's tin box, and with it a check balancing his account.

Riley's fine hand served Overton well in this. As the check and order were veritable, and the firm presenting them quite respectable, Morton was fain to honor them. Inquiry only elicited the fact that Mr. Overton was in Southern Colorado, and contemplated a Mexican business tour.

Riley laughed slyly, in his den, at the effect of the bogus telegrams and the real letters, check, and orders. "I guess I'll let old José keep the tin box," he laughed. "I don't want such dangerous goods!"

Morton gloomily saw one-half his private fortune sunk in securing the losses of the firm! This was met by Seth Wise in his proportion! Not a sign of robbers, funds, or bonds!

Once a week, old Seth dined with the Mortons, and late at night conferred with Harry. Clew, suspicion, or fact, other than the complicity of the vacant-minded fool, Abel Cram, there was none! Even the Inspector was baffled.

Morton waited, his passions tormenting him, in vain for Marie Ashton's return. The snows of winter were on the ground, and Wise, by his lonely fireside, often dreamed moodily over the great calamity. The business was nearly all adjusted, yet Seth remained in the firm, for Morton was not strong enough financially to carry it. "For Claire's sake!" he said. And she, poor woman, was a full partner of Henry Morton's sorrows.

A violent ring at Wise's door-bell, one cold evening, brought in Ed. Haggerty, his clothes flaked with falling snow! His eyes sparkled. "What is it?" old Seth eagerly queried!

"I have one clew, at last. I do a bit now and then on the races! I strolled into a big pool-room down-town, to-day, to see some of the boys. I know all the men there who serve behind the bar. Following my usual plan, I casually brought up this matter. You know it's whispered around very freely now. One of the bar-tenders I know, told me, over a cocktail: 'That clerk used to blow in a good deal of money on the races! He had a Western fellow coaching him, and they used to meet here, and have private rooms! I believe that sharper got the money he stole!'"

Seth Wise's face grew pale as ashes. It was leading home at last!

"Now," said the excited Haggerty, "I had him describe the man. He gave me a picture of this Tom Overton to a hair! I said but little, and he finished: 'There's a fellow can post you better than me! He's the steward of the Insurance Club. All these two men's notes and letters used to be sent over there! Get on to him.' Now, I happened to know this very steward. I strolled in, and set up the drinks. I saw my man. He told me, 'on the quiet,' that this Overton used to lunch and dine there with Cram now and then!"—Haggerty's face was almost ghastly now as he finished,—"and with one other man—but these two men were never together with Overton! It looks bad for the other one, too!"

"Who was he?" Wise sprang up, his voice was thick.

Haggerty recoiled. "For God's sake! Mr. Wise, don't blame me!"

"Who was it? His name!" Wise gasped.

"It was your partner, Henry Morton," said Haggerty, as the old man dropped in a chair, half senseless.

Haggerty grasped a flask from the sideboard. "Here!" he cried—with genuine fright. The banker slowly revived.

When Seth recovered, he feebly said : "Haggerty, not a word to these people, or any living soul, of your suspicions ! "

A faint smile played on the reporter's face. "Never, sir ! " he said, for he really pitied the old hero.

"And why do you join these two men in your suspicions ? " he hesitatingly said.

"Because," impressively said Haggerty, "Cram ran the outside time-lock : Morton, you told me, held the inside combination ! Now, somebody bamboozled this last secret out of Morton ! By God ! I see it all," yelled Haggerty, as he sprang up.

"What do you mean ? " Wise shouted, grasping the nervous man !

"That handsome fiend of a woman robbed Morton the night after the wreck. She went through his papers, and got that combination while he slept ! I'll wager my head on it ! "

Seth Wise groaned. "My God ! can it be ? But they cleared out long before this."

"Ah ! They may be within a mile of us now," Haggerty said. "New York is a hellish place for these hidden rascalities." The clock ticked away noisily.

Silence between the speakers reigned for five minutes. Seth Wise walked up and down the room ! At last, approaching the young man, he said, slowly :

"Take the next steamer. Go abroad. They may have fled to Paris. Cable me your arrival. Write me your address over there. Don't fail to post me. You may hear something. Take Miss Pomeroy with you."

"She goes as Mrs. Haggerty, then," proudly said the scribe.

"All right," said Seth. "You have been loyal to me. This would stop your mouth if you had no other feeling," and he scrawled him a check. "These people may be running around Europe. Watch for them." Hag-

gerty's surprise and joy found no words. "Now don't let me hear of you till your arrival abroad. You, I suppose, will stay bought, now that I have bought you. Off with you, and a safe journey!"

"For Claire's sake I must bear this," said the veteran senior, as he gazed into the glowing coals, alone. "My God! Morton is the cause of all, I fear. An adulterer, a fool, and now a blundering thief or an abject idiot! I will wind the whole business up, by and by." And his pillow was wet with an old man's tears. "I can trust no one."

While the delighted Haggerty hastened away to the arms of his prospective wife, making ready to catch the first steamer, Ralph Burnham and Walter Maxwell were seated in Ralph's rooms in earnest converse. "I am only waiting here to satisfy dear old Seth," remarked Burnham. Maxwell answered, earnestly: "You must try and probe this robbery. It is your duty. I want to tell you, Ralph, of a singular thing. I have been 'doing' the slums and the 'city front' for some city articles I am engaged in getting up. The other night I was spending a couple of hours in an 'all-night' drinking-house down by the South Ferry. Two pretty rough men were at a table next me, and one began talking of a beautiful woman he had taken aboard an outward bound schooner on a tug last Thanksgiving eve. He raved over her. She had a colored girl with her, he said. 'And what's singular,' he continued, 'we ran back with two passengers more near midnight, and one of them was so drunk, or sick, we had to bring him back and put him off on the North River.' This speaker raved about the wonderful woman. I couldn't catch the name of the tug, but the schooner was the Restless, and she was lying at Sandy Hook, inside. After these men went away I found out from the barkeeper the man was a fireman now on a tug called the Faugh à Ballagh. Now, I have a presentiment, this might have been that fool Cram who was

thrust ashore. But who the other passengers were, God knows! I give it to you for what it's worth. It was the night of the robbery."

"It is very strange," said Ralph, making a note in his book of the names. "I'll look into it. I'll speak to Wise, if you've no objection."

Ralph Burnham caught Wise at breakfast, haunted by this story, and briefly gave him the report of Maxwell. The old banker quivered in his chair. "I think it is some mere coincidence," he faltered. "I am sick of conjectures as to the whole thing. The robbery was real. I know that, to my sorrow. But I must get down-town."

Ralph departed, having unbosomed himself. Wise waited till his front door closed, and sent his valet instantly for Haggerty.

The expectant bridegroom suspended his packing, and reported on the run. Seth briefly told him all. "Wait in town a few days. Don't you stop work till you find out about this Restless, and who owns this tug. Don't come into the bank. Just send a boy in for me with this card."

In three hours the old man knew that the respectable Señor José Oliviera, of 25 South Street, was the owner of the Restless, and the landing-place of the tug was easily found.

"Now, off with you!" said Wise, dismissing Haggerty. "I will have this all ferreted out."

An hour with the Inspector caused department experts to search the records, papers, and customs books of the date of the robbery.

"My dear sir," said the Inspector, next day, "Señor Oliviera is one of our leading foreign merchants. The tug-owner is all right. He is an old New York City front towing master. The vessel is on an all-round trading cruise now, but one thing looks suspicious: a man, and a woman with a negro maid, were the three passengers who did go

in her, but their names and descriptions cannot be had till the schooner returns. It may be months. They paid their passage through an agent, with privilege of getting off at Havana or the Windward Islands."

Seth was fain to be content. Mystified and baffled, he felt that Morton was an innocent cause of the disaster. He returned to his office. "Whom can I trust?" he murmured. "Not Morton; I fear his deceit about his private life. Haggerty is off. The police have shown no great force or skill." In his office he mechanically took up a "Herald" as he lit a cigar. "I shall go mad over these worries," he thought. "There is a dark mystery here. Does Morton know anything? Does he suspect?" His eye, roving over the shipping news, caught the name Restless. He had been looking over the South American ports. The brief entry was dated at Colon: "Schr. Restless, New York *via* Truxillo." "I'll settle this soon," he growled. Closeted with a head official of the Western Union Telegraph, he invoked their aid and the use of their own official cipher. Despatches to Colon and Truxillo, in the name of telegraph headquarters, called for every item as to the Restless. Wise tossed in his sleep, dreaming of the mysterious marauders.

Long since, all hope was given up, by the physicians, of returning reason in Cram. He was watched and detained as an imbecile criminal. It would be a month before Flanagan might be relied on to tell the story of his surprise.

At six o'clock the sleeping old man was awakened by a messenger. Two long despatches awaited him. With feverish hand he tore them open. "American man answering your description arrested here for violating customs laws. Sent to Tegucigalpa for trial. He is now there. Schooner ran out of harbor without clearance. Whereabouts unknown." Signed, "Truxillo Office." Wise was seeing now a breaking light. And the other:

"Schooner Restless sailed yesterday for Spanish main trading. She landed here a lady passenger answering to your description. This person sailed for Europe with negro maid three days ago on the French steamer." Signed, "Colon Office."

The old banker quickly sought his lawyer at his house, and their conference was grave and earnest.

"There's no extradition in Spanish Honduras. It's all filled up with renegade scoundrel Americans. Any one with money is safe there. But I don't see why this man and woman would separate. You can't bother her on arriving in France; you have no evidence against her. Besides, she has not got the plunder, you may be sure. The man has it. I would telegraph the American Minister at Guatemala City. There is one legation for the five Central American states. Give him a full description. If the man is there, send some one down to negotiate for the return of the bonds. That is about all you can do. You may save half your loss this way."

Wise prepared a despatch from the eminent lawyer's dictation. The Western Union headquarters gave it special sanction and care. Walking his rooms, like a restless tiger, the aged capitalist pondered over the situation. The gray dawn was struggling in the windows before he decided upon his course.

"I will probe Morton. He shall know my suspicions. If he is honest at heart, he will try to redeem his name. If he is a thief, I owe it to Claire to know and guard her from him."

At the bank, whence all outward semblance of the disaster had vanished, Seth Wise received at noon an official answer from the U. S. Legation:

Man of exact description now at Tegucigalpa, awaiting his trial for violation of customs. Has money, and is suspicious. Would send agent at once. International law is powerless.

U. S. Minister, Central America.

"Now, when I've telegraphed my agent at Havre to watch the Ville de Bordeaux, and shadow the woman, I've done all I can," said Seth, closing his despatch book.

The old financier had placed a reliable man in the bank to replace the absent Burnham. Business, quietly moving on, showed no trace of the shock of the robbery.

"Morton," said Seth Wise, as he donned his overcoat, "please give me this evening at my house on the most important business. I will wait for you." The humbled ex-manager bowed his head, for Seth Wise, with his reserves from the Chemical, was now the mainstay of the bank.

Before a glowing fire, when the stars glittered in the chill wintry air, Wise clearly and plainly unfolded the whole suspicions of his mind to Harry Morton. Absorbed in his own recital, he did not notice the crushed and broken man before him.

"I don't doubt you, Henry, save in one respect, but I do feel that your fatal passion has been in some way the cause of our financial loss. These people have played on your feelings. You have been duped. You have been grossly deceived. This man and woman are operating together. Cram's thievery became in some way known to this Overton, and he has been terrorized. But you—you have been weak. Your carelessness caused this ruin!"

Morton sprang to his feet, with almost a scream. "It's a base lie! Look there!" and he threw out Overton's telegram from Denver, and the orders for the box. Even in his mad rage he dared not show the last despatch from the still absent "Witch of Harlem."

Seth smiled grimly. "My poor boy, now I am sure of the whole plot. These things are decoys and have been arranged. They have had some help here, and not from the ordinary criminal classes. You were robbed first of the combination, and Cram was hunted down and be-

trayed like a dog. The money was carried off on that schooner."

Henry Morton's heart froze. Like a flash of lightning came back the memory of the night when Marie Ashton watched over him, as he slept. The combination had been in his pocket-book.

Streaks of fire danced before his eyes. He paced the room like a tiger.

"Wise," said he, "I'm utterly useless to you now. You can easily handle the business. I am going to leave to-morrow morning for Honduras. I learned Spanish when I was in Cuba. I can travel. I have almost ruined myself. I have also helped to cripple you. Even Claire would be well rid of me. I'll follow that man to Cape Horn, if he has that money and those bonds. You can let Burnham help you out. I leave Claire in your hands."

An hour passed in vain expostulation. "I'll go, if I live to see to-morrow's sun. I'll take the train to New Orleans, go over to Truxillo, and make no sign of my departure."

"Can't we negotiate by some one else?" feebly pleaded Seth.

"Never!" Morton exclaimed.

"Then I go to your house with you," Seth insisted. "Claire must be reasoned with."

Aided by his nimble servants, watched over by Seth and his astonished wife, Morton made his brief preparations. His conference with Wise was short. "I can get all personal supplies in New Orleans." He would not be brooked. So, on a cold and cheerless winter morning, Harry Morton, half crazed, smarting under defeat and having told but half the truth, tore himself from the clinging arms of Claire and went away to face the devil incarnate who had ruined him!

BOOK III.

A BLIND TRAIL.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE BLUE CARIBBEAN. PARTED BY FATE. IN THE HONDURAS MOUNTAINS. NEARING HIS ENEMY.

WHILE Harry Morton, his wolfish eyes now hungering for the first sight of his unmasked foe, sped away to New Orleans, the billing and cooing of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Haggerty, of New York, amused the *blasé* swells of the ocean who crowded La Touraine on her outward voyage.

Haggerty sailed directly to France, as his hot Milesian blood impelled him to "dash down the Sassenach" by declining to give any man in England that universal "shilling," for which the itching palm of the Briton seems to be continually stretched out.

Denying himself the pleasure of visiting the land of Brian Boru, "now under the heel of the red-coated tyrant," as he felicitously put it, Haggerty was spared the wild appeal at parting, "Oh! make it an 'arf a crown, sir," from the swarming domestic sharks of Albion.

Haggerty carried with him the address of Seth Wise's confidential correspondent in Paris, and was carefully instructed to report there for orders from time to time.

Morton, on his flying train, conned over the letters, furnished by Wise, to consuls and ministers, to business houses and steamboat agencies. With a good cipher, abundant funds, and these powerful confidential letters,

guided by the New Orleans steam-packet owners, he was ready for his wild trip into that tropic wilderness where the despairing Cortez buried his priceless veterans in the vain attempt to scale the terrific gorges of interior Honduras. Gold and the lust of gold led the Spaniards there—the never-dying thirst of gold. It was the same cursed lure which dragged Henry Morton to those pestilential tropic forests.

Yet, with all his desire to recover at least Claire's destined legacy, his secret purpose as a man was personal revenge. A deadly revenge for his shame, his exposure, his alienated friends, his estranged wife, and—and—his swelling veins, gorged with black blood in useless rage, proved it—a deadly revenge for the loss of false Marie Ashton!

"Ah, Marie," he groaned, as, shutting his eyes, he could see again her exquisite form, her clinging arms stretched toward him, her eyes of deepest blue shine on him again. The sweep of her golden hair over the snowy shoulders, the swell of her heaving ivory bosom, the rustle of her dress, came back once more, and the faint, intangible perfume clinging to her robes—all these things, memory treasured—maddened him on his lonely way.

"If he has robbed and abandoned her, I'll kill him on sight. If they both have deceived me, I will kill the pair of human devils. The world is not wide enough for Tom Overton to escape me."

A day-dreamer, a passion-crazed lunatic, was Morton, for the fires of unsatisfied passion, insane jealousy, and goading desire drove him onward. Silent and lonely, he lived in the unreal world of these thoughts, forcing him to mental desperation. Maps, books, and plans of travel occupied his leisure, as he whirled away beyond the crested pines of Tennessee to the magnolia groves of the Southland. At New Orleans he eagerly read Seth's

despatches. While busied with outfitting, he waited two days for his steamer to Truxillo.

Morton reviewed the situation. His last telegrams announced that Flanagan, at last, was able to talk. The mystery deepened. The honest watchman's memory was of an unknown assailant only. Abel Cram, he declared, had visited the bank, only to remove some papers from his desk. Examination of Cram's private drawers showed that his daily memoranda and commonplace books had been taken away. Had Cram been terrorized into setting the time-lock by threats of prison? And yet Abel had been foully dealt with. His moderate shortage of money might have run on for years. Morton gave up the tangled threads of this mystery. In Overton was the master mind of the dark intrigue. His private telegrams announced no signal from Marie. The bird had flown forever.

So, with a mass of luggage, with hunting gear, heavy repeating rifle, pistols, ammunition, stores, and all necessaries for two months in the wilderness, Harry Morton, exchanging last telegrams with his wife and Seth, sailed down the great river, past Farragut's old victory-haunted battle-scenes, and on the good steamer Joe Oteri took up the chase of the fugitive of the flying Restless.

Down from the Capes of the Delaware, into balmy airs, under bluest skies braided with great glittering stars at night, bounding over the brilliant blue of the Gulf Stream, her snowy wings aslant, like a swift albatross, the beautiful Restless safely sped with Overton and the sweet-faced human devil he guarded. Day after day of peace and quiet lulled them into every material enjoyment.

Only when Hatteras sent its sudden driving black storm to toss the schooner about like an egg-shell did the frightened siren cling to her rude protector in abject terror. Flashing lightning, roaring surge, and wild whistling winds played around the quivering sea-racer.

With her hundred and forty feet of length half-buried in the green-crested waves, her tall masts whipping in the blackness of the night, lit up only by lurid lightning flashes, her great main boom straining and creaking, the peerless Restless battled bravely with the storm.

Marie Ashton, with pale cheeks, comforted her howling maid in her cabin, under battened hatches. Overhead the hoarse voices of the officers, the trampling of hurrying feet, and howling of the storm were mingled in pandemonium.

Once or twice in the terrible struggle, Overton appeared all dripping at the sliding door to the main cabin. "All's well!" he cheerily cried. "We are lying to, with only a little sail to keep her head to the wind." It was, indeed, only a few square yards of canvas, as the plunging boat was close-reefed all. In sheer fright and exhaustion, Marie slept heavily. When she awakened, the blue expanse was unflecked by a cloud. It was like Thackeray's delightful sketch of the scene whereof he sings in "The White Squall":

> "And when the storm had ended—
> Its harmless force expended—
> And as the daylight splendid
> Came blushing o'er the sea."

So with her beautiful sheer bow leaping over the sparkling waves, the steady breezes from pine-fringed shores filling the snowy clouds of canvas, the dainty Restless tossed her head, and in long graceful curving swoops skimmed away to the palm-fringed shores of Florida, and the brilliant glories of the Caribbean Sea. Overton laughed Marie's idle fears away. It was the last salute of the Storm King, whose black cloud-curtained throne is builded on the forbidding shores of Cape Hatteras.

Self-contained and watchful, Overton was a model passenger. Marie Ashton's cheeks burned with brighter

roses, as she drank in the delicious tropic air. Walking the deck, a sinuous graceful goddess, the sailors deemed her an ocean fairy, a sweet dream, for the breezes sweeping her draperies round her beautiful form, the flowing back-blown tresses of her golden hair, the sparkle of her diamond eyes, proclaimed her a newer Aphrodite—a queen at whose fair feet the proudest man might well sue for one smile from her perfect lips.

On the decks, with Marie clinging to his arm, Overton soon showed his lovely charge the last twinkling light at Key West.

"Say good-by to your Uncle Sam," he merrily cried. "We are now leaving the American waters."

Down through the straits of Cuba, past the wreck-strewn Keys, the fragrant islands and storied haunts of the old buccaneers, the wayward Restless hurried on her flight. It was a dream of an ocean Paradise.

Overton now sat in conference with Captain Jonas Skinner, whose unbounded admiration of the fair Marie proved a true sailor's gallantry.

"I think I'll get off at Truxillo, Captain," Tom quietly decided. "If I finish my business and look around a little, I can take a coasting steamer down to Colon, and go on to Europe from there direct. We may decide to go to South America or stop at Havana."

"Very good! Excellent!" cried Skinner. "I will run in to one of our own islands, and take over ten or fifteen thousand gallons of good Santa Cruz rum. Don José will be two dollars to the good for every gallon I land. If we have any trouble, I'll run out quietly."

"Don't take any wild chances," said Overton.

"Oh! I am free of the whole Honduras coast," the captain laughed. "Many's the successful run I've made. José Oliviera has his secret friends in every port of the Spanish main."

Three days later the Restless folded her white wings in

the beautiful hidden harbor of an old Caribbean buccaneer haunt. A few minutes brought the local members of the association alongside. This secret band of coöperative scoundrels numbered merchants, traders, bankers, smugglers, and officials from Carthagena to Mobile, and from Colon to New York.

Marie's delighted eye roved over the graceful palms, the tall cocoa-trees, the banana and orange groves, and all the tropic wealth. With Overton as her pilot, she visited, in the boats, purpled coral reefs, dim sea-caves, glittering silver inlets, pearl-shell-strewn beaches, and the cunningly devised sheltered bungalows of the conspirators, where lawless luxury reigned.

Swarthy natives, renegade sailors, chattering negroes, and polyglot refugees, quickly loaded the schooner with her contraband goods. Swinging idly at anchor, the delicately modelled boat swam on a sea of blue and silver.

Fishes, fruits, and all the dainties of the tropics made the table service a series of feasts. Under an awning, Marie sat *en reine*. The soft roar of the white-crested breakers from the bar outside lulled her to repose, in her gently swinging hammock. Spiced breezes from this Island of the Blest fanned her lovely brows.

Far up on the towering hill, a deserted freebooter's castle stood, in crumbling ruin, its opening window recesses and silent archways tenanted only by myriad bats and the graceful iguana. Morn and night, the screams of bright-winged tropic birds were incessant, and the forest reaches were alive with green and crimson and golden plumage by day.

Haunted by memories of Lafitte, of Captain Kidd, and all the vanished black-flag heroes of a century gone by, the Diamond Island lay a gem on the bosom of the blue waves circling the wondrously lovely Antilles.

Two days later, silently, swiftly, the graceful ocean wanderer drove along to those crystal seas where the

great Southern Cross shone, a sacred symbol among the brightest jewels of the Almighty's eternal diadem.

"Marie," said Overton as the Diamond Island faded in a cloud of gray and blue and rosy gleams, far astern, "we must now prepare for our landing."

In strictest privacy, the two newly made capitalists arranged and concealed the bulkier portion of the involuntary contribution of Morton, Burnham & Co. to their joint purse. Two false-bottomed trunks enabled the bonds to be deftly concealed. The larger currency was divided in their baggage adroitly.

Overton was an inspirational genius. Directing Marie Ashton's nimble fingers, he achieved the feat of concealing nearly twenty thousand dollars in currency between the linings of his coat and vest. The remainder of the notes was skilfully inserted in various wraps, capes, cloaks, and robes of the newly christened Mrs. Eleanor Laurence.

"Now we are safe for any customs examination," Overton gleefully exclaimed. "In case of trouble, a liberal bribe will free us of any annoyance. I have chosen Truxillo as a first landing-place, because I have José's private cipher with me. His agent can telegraph for me and find out all the New York news. Riley and José are daily together."

Marie Ashton, even at the sea-gates of Central America, did not know all the details of the desperate raid which gave her the baptismal wealth she enjoyed as Mrs. Eleanor Laurence.

"Just as well she should not know all," Overton mused.

"It is as well my new friend, 'Robert Randall,' should not find my twenty-thousand-dollar present from Morton," Marie meditated alone.

Her eyes were very dreamy, as she thought of Morton's unfailing devotion and generous prodigality. "Ah!

it was only reflected vanity," she bitterly exclaimed. "Man's vows are all written in water. I was simply his toy—his plaything. He loved himself in adoring me."

She had never a sigh for the ruined happiness of Morton's hearth and home. The golden clockwork of her heart vibrated to no sympathetic tone. Marie Ashton was a human love machine, of boundless capacity for ringing an infinity of changes on three old well-worn words. They profaned her chiselled lips no more than the simple phrase, "I love you," is belied by the social Messalinas of swelldom, the swarming adventuresses of the Western world, or the acute-minded Delilahs of Europe, whose inviting glances thrill the pulses of friend, lover, stranger, and shine out seductively wherever man is to be preyed on.

On, past picturesque and lovely Ruatan—dashing by stormy Bonacca and sea-girt Utilla, outpost islands of the old Spanish realm of the Conquistadores—the Restless swung into beautiful Truxillo Bay, passing the first point of the mainland the daring Genoese navigator discoverer saw in his world-finding voyages.

Far to the west, uplifting sentinel peaks to the tropic skies, the great mountains hanging over old Truxillo towered in misty cloud-wreaths.

"I will run in and see that all is right. I'll send a boat ashore first and warn our friends. You can go off and see our secret agent. Then I'll land you and Mrs. Laurence. This cargo is all safe. I'll run up a few miles and run the rum ashore. Our people will be on the lookout." So Captain Skinner advised Overton as the Restless swooped in, a graceful dream of beauty, dear to a sailor's eye, skimming the glassy waters of the bay.

"Very good, Captain," said Overton. "I can make all arrangements for Mrs. Laurence's comfort. Won't you go ashore?"

"I don't wish to leave the cargo alone a minute.

Besides the rum, I have also some valuable confidential freight for the Windward Islands. I will see our trusty secret friend here, when I lay off Cristales Springs to-night, and land the rum. He will be on the lookout for my red-lantern signals. Our code is well known."

In an hour the great snowy canvas sails fluttered down, or were folded silently. With a graceful swoop, under current and rudder, the pretty Restless dropped her anchor in five fathoms of water.

All was now in readiness with the strangely rebaptized couple who were to make their last social *entrée* as Robert Randall and Mrs. Eleanor Laurence. Marie's eyes rested on a semicircular chain of bare, purpled, high mountains, stretching to northwest and south—peak piled on peak. Lower valleys lay at their feet, dreaming in tropic luxury of tangled foliage. Along the low white beach for miles, north and south, dense orange, palm, and banana groves dreamily lay under the shimmering heat of the fiery vertical sun.

Perched on a rocky plateau, a hundred feet above the sea-level, Truxillo's white masonry walls were scattered for a mile along this natural shelf. An old Spanish fort gallantly clung to the extreme rocky bluffs, a fluttering nondescript banner telling there of the burlesque Republic of Honduras. Ruined old roofless Spanish-built banqueting halls yawned to the blue sky. Over archway and postern, the royal arms of Spain still mocked the newer order. Knight and *caballero*, in armor and lace, haughty Spanish dames in silks and velvets, cowled priests with massy chains and crucifix of stolen Indian gold, toasted "good" King Philip here, long before the Indians had ceased to slay the red deer on Manhattan Island. On the plaza, flagged with broad stones, an old church, its white walls shining in the fierce light, sent forth a mournful clang from its cracked bells. Lazy half-Indian sentinels, turning on wall and bastion, sent

flashes of light across the waves from their twinkling bayonets.

Crowds of the dreamy, idle, vicious, nonchalant dwellers in this dead city of three centuries rubbed their fierce dark eyes as the smart Yankee yacht swept in—a fairy vision.

The schooner's boat was manned. With a few parting words whispered to Marie, Overton descended to the boat. At ten boats' lengths, he turned and waved his hat in a gay adieu to the provokingly lovely woman, who followed him with those wonderful star-like eyes. There was not a shade on her fair face as she turned to her maid, who was astounded at the crowd of swarthy black Carib canoemen who swarmed and chattered around the schooner, in their little boats dug out of a single log.

"Let no one board the boat—only the Commandante," cried watchful Jonas Skinner. That precious twenty thousand dollars' worth of rum might be in danger from prying eyes.

In a few moments, Overton's boat halted half-way to the shore, and idly drifted, as the official boarding party of an officer and six men signalled them not to land until they were "officially permitted." Marie retired to her cabin, as a gold-banded, bedizened half-breed—decked in a travesty of the French uniform, and loaded down with sabre and pistols—sprang over the side. His barefooted, linen-clad boatmen, armed with ugly-looking revolvers, hung alongside.

In perfect confidence, having merrily said adieu for the moment to Overton, Marie was entirely at home, until the sound of angry wrangling voices reached her ears. Timidly venturing on deck, she saw the dark-faced officer, scowling with rage, urge his boatmen rapidly toward the shore. His loud jargon rang over the water, and he shook a handful of papers menacingly.

"Captain, there is nothing wrong, I hope," Marie cried, as Jonas Skinner, with cloudy brow, approached the quarter-deck.

"One moment, madam," he hastily said, keeping his marine glasses fixed on Overton's boat. The two boats neared the shore together.

"Mr. Hooper!" Skinner cried, with a ring in his voice which made every man jump. "Stand by! Call all hands."

"Aye, aye, sir!" briefly the mate rejoined, as the whole crew sprang to their stations.

Turning to the frightened Marie, Skinner said, with some concern: "They've got a new Governor here, Mrs. Laurence. This beggarly post commandant is growling because your three names are not on our manifest as 'passengers.' He's taken away my papers, and gone ashore to see the Governor. I hope it will be all right." Marie felt her heart suddenly sink. "Mr. Hooper!" cried the captain. The mate approached. Only the second mate and two men were in the boat with Overton. A whispered colloquy ensued as both officers kept their double glasses fixed on the customs landing. In five minutes the yacht's boat was bounding swiftly over the water on its way back. But Tom Overton was missing. The men dashed alongside. The mate jumped to the captain's side, handing him a note.

Jonas Skinner hastily read it. "No, I'm d——d ifI do! I can't lose seventy-five thousand dollars. Mr. Hooper!" he roared, "all hands up anchor. Get under way."

In five minutes the anchor was apeak, and the men sprang to their stations ready to hoist the sails. A breeze rippled the water.

"Ah! my God," Marie Ashton cried, as a boom from the fortress sent a round-shot humming noisily along a few hundred yards away. "Captain," she screamed, "they are firing at us."

"Go below, madam," Jonas yelled, and in a voice of thunder then cried: "Make all sail!" For, tumbling over each other in haste to embark, three boat-loads of negro soldiery, their bayonets glistening, slowly drew away from the strand toward the schooner.

Marie Ashton, from her little cabin window, saw these menacing pursuers bending to their oars. Fanny, the frightened maid, howled frantically at the sight: "We will all be murdered." Above them, yells and cries were mingled with the rattling of ropes and the drag of the loosening sails.

Marie rushed on deck, for the beautiful Restless slowly swung to seaward, and, as sail after sail was sheeted home, dashed saucily out to sea over the blue curling waves. The Witch of Harlem could not trust her own eyes, as the stern-faced Yankee captain yelled: "Set every stitch. Lively there!"

A chorus of frantic yells was borne over the waters, as, three hundred yards away, the three boats heavily loaded with soldiers swung into line.

"Look out, everybody!" roared Skinner, in a voice of thunder, as, making the wheel fly in his sinewy hands, he held the flying sea-wanderer straight on her course. "Lie down all!" he yelled, as he threw Marie Ashton to the deck, with no lover's grasp. A storm of rifle balls whistled high over the deck. In three minutes Jonas Skinner gave up the wheel, and laughed as the faint puffs of smoke from the castle walls showed that the old honeycombed smooth-bore cannon were at work. The balls fell far short of the flying smuggler.

Raising Marie, while a sturdy sailor took the wheel, Captain Jonas Skinner assisted her below and gave her a half-tumbler of his best Jamaica. Marie was half-fainting.

The defiant Restless was scudding along, under all her racing sails, like a water-witch, as Marie, her eyes

filled with tears, cried: "What is this? Where's Randall?" Skinner, in his excitement, did not notice the question.

"Madam, we're all human beings. Life is sweet. I've got the savings of twenty years in this boat and a fifty-thousand-dollar cargo. If these devils had reached us, we would have all been in a filthy Honduras prison tonight." While Marie was stunned by this surprise, Captain Skinner called: "Set the American colors, Mr. Hooper. We'll show them both our flag and our heels."

Turning to lovely, tearful Marie, he said proudly: "The devil himself couldn't catch us now. You have got the Queen of the Sea racing for your life."

"Can they pursue us?" Marie faltered, with trembling lip.

Skinner laughed, as the dainty Restless bounded from surge to surge, the breeze freshening to almost a gale. "We can beat anything afloat with sticks in her."

"And Mr. Randall?" she sobbed, her presence of mind returning.

The captain's brow was grave. "He is in no real danger. He has his passport, of course. I told him not to go ashore armed. I am only sorry he has probably no money with him—but he can get that of our agent. They'll only lock him up for a few days. They won't dare to harm him. It was life and death to me. They would throw me in prison, confiscate the boat and cargo, and perhaps cut my throat in the calaboose. They have had political changes. A revolution is brewing. If those hounds searched me, they would find the rum, and seventy-five thousand dollars would be lost as well as our liberty. I'm sorry for Randall. He can telegraph to the State Department, and the United States Minister at Guatemala City. They'll let him go soon. Now, you take a sleep. The wind is freshening.

We have tornadoes here. To-morrow night you'll be three hundred miles from here."

"But where am I going, captain?" the lovely Witch of Harlem asked. "What can I do alone?"

The captain scratched his head. "It had to be—I could not help it. Let me put a hundred miles between us and these black devils. The United States never protects its citizens abroad. I am considering all interests. Don't fret about Randall. Rest now, and take your dinner. You're as safe here as in your own home. We will decide to-night. José Oliviera told me to guard you as if you were his own daughter." And the keen-eyed sailor went to his nightly duties, and cigar, for the shores of Honduras were fading fast away.

"Now, madam," said the captain, cheerfully, three hours later, "I have thought all over. I'll run you down to Colon. You have a telegraph there. Randall can soon join you. You can wire to our agent. You can also communicate with America. If you find it necessary, you can go on to Europe, or back to the United States. I will sell my rum there at a good profit. I have some cargo for the Windward Islands. Think it over for a half-hour, and let me know. You could get to Havana from the Windward Islands. If you wish anything, simply tell me. My own boy will wait on you, and sleep in this outer cabin."

Marie, seated on deck in the moonlight, turned over the whole situation. Like an inspiration, she remembered that Overton had his concealed twenty thousand dollars inside his coat. "That's plenty for the present. He is cool and boundless in resource. I'll go down to Colon and communicate with him. We can then go on to Europe, and to the East, where no questions are asked."

So the lovely newly baptized Mrs. Eleanor Laurence acceded to the captain's sensible plan. "You see," said

he, "if anything should happen to Randall, which God forbid! you are in a place to move at once in any direction, for business or safety, in the quickest way. The flight was forced on me."

So the storm-defying Restless flew along the shores of Central America, and five days later "Mrs. Eleanor Laurence" was in peace and comfort at the best hotel in Colon—the old "Aspinwall." Keeping her own counsel, Marie Ashton decided on her future course. "I have this fortune. My God! if I should be taken sick, I have no one to trust. I cannot depend on this yellow idiot Fanny. I will inform myself of Tom, and then leave Colon."

At Marie's earnest request, Captain Skinner used the telegraph lavishly to their Truxillo agent. After a day, the worst of news was confirmed. Randall was harshly treated on account of the escape of the Restless. Already hurried away to the interior to the capital of Honduras, he was, under a strong escort of soldiers, climbing the giant peaks, and crossing the deadly forests with their dangerous rivers to Tegucigalpa, seven thousand feet in air.

"It will be months before he is freed," loyal Captain Skinner said. "Write him what you want. Telegraph your safe address in Europe to our agent at Truxillo now. I will also write him. I'll send all the letters to our man there, and tell him to spare no money in their delivery. Now, I sail to-morrow. It is yellow-fever time. Take my advice—either take the steamer back North, or go on to Paris: the French boat sails to-morrow. Write to José Oliviera by me. I'll explain all to him. He will work for Randall's release."

"You are right," Marie Ashton said. "It is my only safety," she mused.

When the Restless danced out of the harbor next day, Captain Jonas Skinner carried the finest gold chronome-

ter and chain that Colon could furnish, with an inscription, "To Captain Jonas Skinner, of the Restless, from Eleanor Laurence."

"She's the sweetest thing in woman guise my eyes ever rested on," enthusiastically cried Skinner, as he saw the smoke of the French steamer fade into the horizon next day. It bore Eleanor Laurence, once the Witch of Harlem, to strange lands.

As she rested in the luxurious ease of the boat, her indomitable heart turned far away to Tom Overton. She did not know that her laughing adieu in Truxillo Harbor was "Good-by forevermore!" And the white stars swinging over her head guided the stanch steamer safely to the shores of France.

Tom Overton, rage in his heart, had waited on the strand of Truxillo, after his insolent questioning, with a frontier traveller's scorn of an inferior race. "I'll not let them know that I speak Spanish," he thought at once. "It gives me a double power."

A self-important port official showered him with questions in broken English as to why his companion and himself were not regularly entered as passengers.

"It's the fault of the ship's people, Commandante," he answered smoothly. The cool gambler looked forward to a fine of a few dollars only. But fate was against him.

When the yells of the half-breed soldiery startled him —as he waited for the captain's arrival—Tom looked out, and his eyes started from his head as he saw the white-winged Restless speeding to sea.

"This is utter ruin to me," he gasped. "By God! there goes the only woman I ever loved—and two hundred thousand dollars. This is hell!" And he gnashed his teeth, as he reflected that he was unarmed and helpless.

In twenty minutes the baffled commandant stormed up to him, pistol in hand. "*Vamos—adelante, Gringo,*" he

cried. No explanation was permitted. A murderous hound of a ragged soldier pricked him with his bayonet. In five minutes, Tom Overton was locked up in the old Cuartel Prison, with a stone jar of water and a pile of dirty cassava bread as his sumptuous dinner. With impotent rage, he yet kept quiet.

Overton reflected that he had money—a fortune—with him. "By God! they'll cut my throat if they suspect. I'll have to suffer a little." And he threw himself on the rawhide-covered bed. Showered with every insult, he was awaked at dawn, next day. The brutal curses and menaces of his guards moved him not. Tom Overton had faced Comanche, Sioux, and Apache—he had wagered his life on the quickness of his trigger finger a dozen times—the war and his criminal life had also hardened him to patience. When the Alcalde loftily questioned him, he simply asked for the American Consul.

This man—a half-breed, steeped in local swindles and smuggling intrigues—listened carelessly to Overton's story.

"Have you money?" he said, in broken English.

"No, I have only my passport and a few dollars in my pocket."

"Then, I'm afraid you'll have to suffer," said the greedy official. Overton asked for José Oliviera's agent. A swarthy gleam shot across the consul's face. "What do you come here for?" he said.

"Can't you see," said Overton, "I am beguiled ashore, without my papers or baggage?"

"Yes, but you give a very poor account of yourself," said the consul, as he refused to telegraph to Oliviera for Tom, and left him to his fate. "Your schooner will be classed as a pirate."

At night, Oliviera's agent finally visited him in prison, and gave him a hundred silver dollars, with a letter to

their great protector in Tegucigalpa. "I'll write at once to Don José," he said kindly, as he left a bottle of whiskey and some cigars. "I am afraid of my life. This escapade has been ruinous to me. Now, I have the decision in your case. They will send you up to Tegucigalpa to be tried for conspiracy against the customs. It's a fearful trip of twenty days. I'll wait, and bribe the escort soldiers to let you have a mule and treat you decently. I'll give them some things for your journey. But once there, our local friend can telegraph to Don José, and you can get out by Amapala, on the Pacific, and go home by Panama and Colon, or to San Francisco. God be with you! Be wary. Hide your watch and chain. They would cut your throat here for five dollars. I have fear for myself. I do not dare to do more. Ah! it is unfortunate."

In the outskirts of the town, next day, the frightened secret agent darted out from a palm-grove, as the sergeant and three men trotted alongside of Overton's mule. A few parting words, a handing over of some money all round, and surreptitious comforts, and Tom Overton plunged—a prisoner—into the defiles of the great mountains with their fringing forests, alive with deadly reptiles and wildest beast. He toiled through the gloomy wilderness where stout Cortez buried three hundred of his invincible marauders.

Twenty days later, more dead than alive, Tom Overton was thrust into the common jail at the mountain capital with the commonest felons as his companions. The irony of fate weighed him down. While appealing at once for justice, and the secret aid of Oliviera's powerful friend, Overton beat his head madly with his fists, as he thought of defenceless Marie Ashton—lost to him perhaps forever—and with two hundred thousand dollars in her hands! Could he trust the lovely waif?

He divided his loose silver with the humble escort, who

looked for a double gratuity on their return ; he wrote a brief letter to the frightened agent at Truxillo, and now revolved in his mind how to use his money to effect his liberty. In a few hours he was warned that this friend would see him soon. The air was thick with revolutionary rumors. The hot blood of the mountaineers was at boiling point ; and plodding step by step over the terrific defiles behind him, Henry Morton, his bloodshot eyes fixed on the distant mountain-ranges, was nearing his enemy. While these two drew toward each other, for fate's fell purposes, Marie Ashton's marvellous face and low, velvety voice were charming the voyagers on the French steamer.

CHAPTER XII.

A BATTLE DAY WITH THE HONDURAS REVOLUTIONISTS. FACE TO FACE. MORTON WIPES OUT HIS SCORE. TREASURE TROVE. YELLOW JACK.

While Overton lingered in the jail at Tegucigalpa, Harry Morton, the avenger of love, fretting on the New Orleans steamer, entered Truxillo Harbor. The old Italian millionnaire steamer owner at New Orleans, who had for twenty years intrigued with the thieving Honduras officials, grasping Morton's hand, said, as the boat swung into the mighty river : "Beware of Spanish Honduras—a land of treachery, fevers, murder—the home of refugees and vilest criminals. Conceal your business—your property. Watch over yourself night and day. I have to send my ships to its shores. I would not go in the fatal interior for a king's ransom. It is sown with the graves of the unavenged."

Morton explained that he had taken no passport. "I am just 'Henry Anderson' for a month or so. I will go

over to the Pacific coast, and come home *via* San Francisco. I will have stanch friends at the capital, and I have strong letters to the United States Minister."

"Go—may God protect you!" said the hospitable old millionnaire fruit merchant. He sighed to see the splendid fellow depart.

"One other—perhaps one other sacrifice," the gray-headed Italian sadly said, as he regained the shore in his tug.

But Harry Morton, undaunted and with every faculty heightened by his mental fever, keenly watched the dozen passengers on the Oteri. A grumbling old Cuban ex-general, a stray aged Spanish doctor, two or three petty Italian traders along the coast, and a New Orleans beer "drummer," going to timidly visit the coast towns—not leaving the steamer as a lodging place—were the principal passengers. Besides these, several half-breed, mongrel Honduranean youths were returning from more or less "schooling" at the North. These precocious lads had picked up every known American vice, and a smattering of our language. Proud, lazy, vicious, and violent—they were the result of mestizo breeding, and a thoroughly precocious dissipation.

With considerable personal reticence, Morton, as the steamer neared Truxillo, yet had gained from the cabin gossip the general destinations of the voyagers. After a conference with the jolly Genoese captain—for these fruit steamers sail under the Italian flag—the young banker found the least murderous-looking of the Honduranean youths was Don Fernando Rodriguez Montaldo de Ortega—a wild nephew of the pompous Secretary of War of this opera-bouffe republic. He was going back to the capital, over that terrific and lonely road, where gorges, cliffs, swollen rivers, treacherous thieves, millions of poisonous insects and snakes, with roving murderers, make the narrow trail, dug out along its beetling cliffs,

or winding through the miasmal death-haunted forests, a voyage perilous.

"He's better than nobody, after all," Morton thought. "He knows, at least, the road." With no thought of turning back—driven by shame to recover at least a part of Claire's future endowment—goaded on by a passionate revenge, in the hope of yet finding a path to the missing Witch of Harlem, Morton imparted to the yellow youth his desire to go to the capital.

"To see some mines, I suppose?" murmured the lazy lad, cigarette in mouth.

Morton nodded. "It's a secret."

"Oh, yes," smiled the youth. "It's always so. We don't bother with the mines."

Standing on the customs landing, under the walls of the old castle of Truxillo, Harry Morton, on a sweltering day, guided by the youth—who had some real local prestige, a reflection of his uncle—passed his effects, and was permitted to see the "acting American Consul."

While Don Fernando renewed his Truxillo flirtations —for he was the one travelled Don Juan of the old city— Morton learned, from an accurate description, of Overton's probable whereabouts, and gained the whole story of the flying Restless. His letter to the United States Minister procured him a *laissez-passer* passport certificate.

Disguising all interest in the Overton episode, Morton gave a dinner at the Hotel Crespo to the Consul, Don Fernando, and the murderous-looking Commandante. Don Fernando had obtained mules and Indians for the three-hundred-mile journey, and was now anxious to leave early next day. For revolution was in the air.

Good smuggled champagne soon loosened the Commandante's tongue. "Beware, my *amigos*, of the revolution. By our *telegrafo* we hear of a great unrest at Tegucigalpa. Don Fernando, you will surely meet the

mail runners on the road. Here is an order to all the alcaldes of the towns along the road to protect you. If you run into any trouble, leave the road, and hide in the ranches, until the storm is over. If your good uncle should be proscribed—you know what our wars are—you would be" (he made a motion of a sweeping throat-cutting) "and the *señor Americano*, all the same."

"True," said the cunning, half-cowardly youth. "I will be watchful. We can always run over to the Guatemala border."

Morton, though chilled at heart, was still too proud to turn back. When the Consul adroitly led the Commandante on to describe his official visit to the Restless, Morton's blood boiled, as the soldier floridly dilated on the wondrous beauty of the señora on the boat.

"It was Marie, by God!" he groaned, his heart riven with mad jealousy. Was she only a vile adventuress? Had Tom Overton carried her away to disguise his robbery? The chance was at least open to establish her comparative innocence.

The young banker was further convinced as the Commandante described the colored servant's obsequious attention to her mistress. "Yes, that's Fanny, the maid," Morton mentally decided. "Now, Marie is, after all, a lying fraud—for her telegram to me was forged, and sent on to throw us off the track. Heartless!"

Swallowing his wine in great draughts, behind a blue smoke cloud, he carelessly asked: "Where did this smuggling vessel run to—do you think?"

"Oh, *Diablo!* they can run over to the Windward Islands, or to Cuba, or any Nicaraguan port. They can sell their cargo, and land the lady anywhere. Then they will get a return cargo of logwood, rosewood, mahogany, and hides at any port. They will clear back to New York. Our authorities cannot touch them. We have no navy!"

As Morton bowed his hilarious guests out, in the stillness of the old plaza, before whose mouldering colonnade of the ruined banquet hall, William Walker, the great filibuster general, was shot to death, the half-crazed young man swore to follow this quest to the death. He was now alone. Don Fernando was making a night of it, with the Truxillo gallants. Morton wandered out before the antique church. The call of the lazy sentinel sounded musically from the walls, and the great white stars mirrored themselves in the lovely bay. From the low sandy shore came the soft murmur of the breakers, washing a beach ten leagues long.

Turning toward the towering mountains, dividing him from his deadly foe, Henry Morton swore that only death should decide their quarrel when he faced Tom Overton.

The wary Consul received a sheaf of telegraphic inquiries, which Morton confided to his official dignity. At the first village on their route of twenty-five days' toilsome march, the Consul promised to telegraph the whereabouts of the imprisoned "Robert Randall."

When the wild bugles assembled the ragged garrison of Truxillo at dawn, Morton and Don Fernando, mounted on diminutive mules of supernatural wisdom, filed out into the overhanging tangle of the Honduranean jungle. The Consul and Commandante, with the local habit of rising with the birds, waved adieu after exhausting the ceremonies of the stirrup cup. Armed to the teeth, the two strange companions rode along, their bare-legged retainers driving a couple of pack-mules. These men were clad in a single cotton garment, bare-headed, with rough rawhide sandals, and a vicious-looking *machête* at their side: the Indians, with loud shrill shouts, urged the mules on with judicious profanity, deftly rolling corn-husk cigarettes, as they kept up their easy jog-trot.

Far down on the lovely bay, as the morning sun

sparkled on its dancing waters, the canoes of the coal-black Carib natives were returning—poled along in the shallow waters—laden with superb fish and heralded by mournful pagan-like blasts from their conch-shell bugles.

Ten miles from Truxillo the riders left the lowland and ascended a fearful gorge, whose narrow trail, with a dashing brook hundreds of feet below, was made step by step of square stones, laid down for the old Conquistadores by the Indian slaves who died under sword, spear, and the lash. Closing his eyes, Morton was forced to trust the mule. His head swam. The terrific heat enervated him, and he listlessly watched the advance runners lopping off overhanging poisonous branches, and sweeping away bushes with easy strokes of their heavy razor-edged *machêtes*. Snake and scorpion, centipede and tarantula, swarmed upon these thorn-armed boughs.

Nothing daunted, Morton struggled along, his set teeth clinched, as he dreamed in his angry heart: "His blood or mine!" For, far beyond the treasure he sought to regain, Marie Ashton, the beauteous enchantress, was the prize he fought for in this deadly wilderness.

On, crawling upward for hours, the first peak was gained. At the summit Morton turned, at Bella Vista, and had his last look at the bay first ploughed by Columbus' keel. Resolutely urging his mule forward, he plunged for hours over terrific descents, where the sure-footed mule dropped from stone to stone like a mountain goat.

At night, in a dirty straw-thatched hovel, with squalid, half-naked women and children around, in a maze of dogs, pigs, and chickens wandering around, the clubman sweltered in a hammock, swung in the one room, and clutching his pistol holster, still belted on him, twisted his fingers in the cord by which the weapon was swung round his neck. The wildest dreams haunted him. He was now face to face with Overton. Struggle and

visions of fight lingered around him, until some taunting fairy of the night brought him dreams of dazzling Marie Ashton, lying once more prone in his arms—her rich red lips pressed to his own, as on that moonlight night when the swift Fantine bore them out into the silver radiance of the moonlit Sound. Alas! his weary arms opened empty—at morn.

Up with the dawn, on through bits of opening, with wild-looking cattle here and there, under great arches of the enormous trees, where the daylight glimmered through tangled vines, brilliant with richest colors of flowers, dazzling the eye, they pressed. Myriads of parrots, macaws, monkeys, and great birds made the woods ring with discordant cries. The armadillo scuttled away in his horny armor, and the savage yells of the escort announced hourly the death of some deadly snake under the heavy *machête* blade. Don Fernando, taciturn, lazy, and inert, lolled in his saddle and nursed his cigarette. Morton, preoccupied, nursed his growing thirst for a double vengeance. Only a few straggling huts—an occasional half-naked runner, staff in hand, a gourd full of water slung at his belt, passed, puffing his never-ending cigarette.

Four hundred years of Spanish rule had sent the great tribes of this mysterious half-explored land to the misery of a dreadful death. They died drudging in the river beds for the scanty grains of floating gold.

Two days of this voyaging brought Morton to the first town, a straggling mud-hut village of the plain. It was only a little less squalid than the Indian clustered huts along the road. The Alcalde of Sonaguera handed Don Fernando two despatches. One for Morton, in Spanish, announced: "Man still here in prison, awaiting trial for complicity in escape of schooner and attempted smuggling." Morton's muscles nerved themselves to whipcord. Onward, onward, his mad hate urged him.

Don Fernando and the Alcalde, with gloomy brows, studied the other: "Imminent danger of trouble at the capital."

The Alcalde gravely informed Morton that a dissatisfied general proposed to put an end to the arbitrary rule of General Don Luis Bogran, the tyrannous President. This self-developed despot—once an obscure banana planter—emulated in his greed, rascality, and robberies the bloody tiger of Guatemala—Barrios. Bogran's armed heel crushed servile Honduras. It was innate cowardice and lack of nerve alone which kept him from filling a thousand graves with butchered political victims, and watering the plains with blood in imitation of Barrios' appalling career.

"We are all right," Don Fernando lazily remarked, as they drew away from the town, after a noon rest. "We can get over to Guatemala by a mountain road. I will hide myself there, and you can wait or get down to the Pacific coast. *Vamos, amigo!*" he cried, spurring his weary mule.

"But Bogran will conquer. He has all the artillery—most of the soldiers—all the money. He is friendly with the band of brave American miners in the mountains."

"What will he do with the revolutionists?" Morton asked.

"Oh! shoot the whole lot of officers and turn the rest of the men into the army," placidly said Don Fernando, taking a fresh cigarette.

Three days brought them to the great silent Aguan River, its swollen current winding through trackless groves of palm, mahogany, cedar, and huge tropic trees. In its jungles the tiger and wild boar roamed. Ferried across the tide by the Indians of a squalid village, again the voyagers plunged into the almost unbroken gloom of the reeking, steaming, pathless forests. Occasional

lonely plains, covered with wild cattle, gave them vistas of the far-rising mountains, covered with straggling pines, over which they must plod in a half-dozen toilsome ascents before the final spinal ridge was reached.

Morton was now hardened to the sights and sounds of a Honduranean wilderness. The animating purpose of an impending revenge buoyed him up. Camping in the forest, his hammock swung from tree-branches, and gazing on the untold miseries of the half-starving natives, the banker realized what a mocking Paradise of the eye this fever-haunted land was in truth. Lonely graves, with a rude cross of sticks tied together with rawhide, told of the deadly work of beast, snake, or furtive murderer. Huge cairns of stone marked these, where the ignorant Indian passer-by cast his pebble, as a passing tribute to the unknown dead.

Onward, up the great valley of the Aguan, the little cavalcade plodded, now over arid plains, covered with yellow logwood shrub, wild stony-sided mountains rising around, through mystic unexplored forests; and the wanderers toiled into Olanchito, with its church three hundred years old, one half-Indian priest ministering to the black-robed dejected women of the decayed town—a forgotten city of the plain.

Here all was commotion. The wild Olancheros—*machête* on thigh and armed *en banditti*—were straggling away to future fields of rapine and carnage. Matters neared a crisis.

"We will still go ahead," cried Don Fernando. "It is time to cross to Guatemala when two days from Tegucigalpa."

Over the Aguan—now divided—beyond Arinal, in the closing mountain gaps, the little train wound up to a huge spinal ridge, from whence, after toilsome hours, the animals slipping on the dry pine-needles, they perilously dropped into the round valley of Jocon, in the heart of

the mountains. Here, straggling watch-fires and wild fandango told of the coming revolution. The hill-dwellers were all in arms.

Two days of frightful climbing found the voyagers clinging like flies to the terrible trails, winding along the bluffs of the Mangalile River. Here over these flinty hill-sides, where a single misstep meant a fall of two thousand feet to the river below, tearing along in its deep gorge, they passed over the death-scene of Cortez's exhausted followers, who perished here by scores in olden times. After a sheer descent of five thousand feet, dragging over beetling mountain-cliffs for weary miles, Morton spent two days wandering in the awful glen of the mysterious Mangalile, peopled with its devils, witches, and ghosts. From time to time, even his stout heart sank.

Grasping his rifle stock or revolver butt, his heated pulses throbbed only for vengeance. Several stragglers had now joined them. The gloomy trails, a foot only in width at dangerous places, were thronged with fleeing women, the aged, and squalid, half-starved children. It was a time of horror.

Jaded and desperate, their supplies half-exhausted, the climbers passed the old decayed Indian town of Mangalile, and climbed the enormous water-shed ridges toward Tegucigalpa. From there—if war were not in progress—a descent to the Pacific and escape from this tropic hell on earth was possible. Beast and serpent, venomous insect, poisonous flying and creeping things, ceased to annoy Morton. The heated poisonous steam of the low swampy forests gave way to the chill mountain air. Sullen, with blood madness flushing his eyes, he neared the foe he sought. At night, in all the yells and screams of the never-silent forest, the wild jaguar's hoarse cry called to him for vengeance.

Three days, now, only lay between them and the cap-

ital. They passed the Guatemala trail, deciding finally to keep on the road. Half-starved, they ceased to fear even death.

At night, one day from the old capital, by the little watch-fire, their Indians lay along like dogs. In the two hammocks, Morton and the now frightened Don Fernando half-slumbered, their arms near.

With a snort a hardy mountain pony pulled up, as a mounted man dashed down the trail. "*Quien vive?*" cried Don Fernando, forgetting his laziness, as he cocked his Winchester. He could murder at a pinch.

Morton's heavy frontier revolver was also levelled at the intruder. In a moment's parley, the youth recognized a loyal Government messenger. His story was soon told. The storm of revolution had filled the streets with dead and dying. The President was driven out of the capital, with his Cabinet. The jails were all thrown open. The populace, sacking the drinking booths, were in madness.

This messenger was one of a dozen, riding for life to summon secret aid from Guatemala. Don Fernando learned that the evicted Dictator Bogran and his half-defeated army were twenty miles away, awaiting reinforcements to recapture the capital. He had saved the Gatling guns, but the artillery and main stores were with the rebels under half a dozen self-styled generals. Six hundred desperate convicts, now liberated, with arms from the Government arsenal, reinforced the human devils in possession of the old capital, whose heavy buildings around the old plaza were now well fortified.

"What will we do?" cried Morton, his own safety now at stake.

"We will travel on easily, leave the road, and join the Government army. It is our only safety," said Don Fernando, terrified into some activity. "I know every inch of the ground." Away they hastened.

The next night, Morton and the youth rode within the lines of Don Luis Bogran's desperate forces. Short time was there for ceremony. Don Fernando was conducted to his uncle, who was in the anxious circle around the President-General. For the straggling deserters and refugees announced an attack in force by the revolutionists on the next day. A few words were wasted by the official on Morton, who found thirty or forty scattered American miners among the fifteen hundred men at bay on the pine-clad hill-sides. Miners, refugees, one or two well-known embezzlers, with a few straggling sailors; the Americans in the camp were under the guidance of two or three veterans of the Civil War, mostly ex-Confederates. Henry Morton was welcomed and made a brief acquaintance, for the whole camp was felling timber abattis, building stone barricades, digging rifle-pits, and waiting for the battle morn to plant the Gatlings.

In three hours Henry Morton was one of the guiding spirits of the American contingent. His splendid outfit of arms, his five hundred rounds of Winchester cartridges, and his awakened spirit made him welcome. For in his heart burned the presentiment that his own foe was among the desperate liberated prisoners. An old frontiersman, a desperate adventurer, Overton would fight like a devil for freedom.

An impromptu mass-meeting around the watch-fire resulted in all the Americans being told off in four squads, one each for the right, centre, and left, and one as sharpshooters to protect or hold the precious Gatling guns.

The discordant howls of tigers and other prowling, hungry beasts sounded all night in the forest. The calls of distant sentinels resounded, while the moon lit up the rolling mountain-spurs with floods of silver. Around the fires, for the morning air was chill, knots of desperate Olancheros, cut-throats from Yoro, and even wild Indians

of the half-tamed tribes, gathered, smoking, and drinking the maddening rum of the land. They were ominously sharpening their *machêtes*. Morton's Indians clung around him—the animals and stores in shelter—while Don Fernando, returning from the main councils, announced the onward march of the triumphant revolutionists. Bogran, attacked when half-ready, had been easily driven from his capital. Declining battle for a few days he was now strengthening, while the victors were daily disorganized by easy-won victory. Long before the battle-day, several strong bodies joined the camp, and swift runners brought news of the secret arrival of Guatemalan help. The sandalled Indian can race fifty miles a day over the declivities of trackless Honduras almost as the crow flies, gliding snake-like around cliff and precipice. It was these returning emissaries who announced the near help of Bogran's allies. Shouts and *vivas* spread this good news.

Harry Morton, stretched on his blankets, was too excited to sleep. He was in this circle of fifty or more cut-off Americans, who had decided to act together for life and liberty. Numbers of these, accustomed to frontier or other warfare, lay resting in a soldier's careless slumber. Of their number, five patrolled their own lines hour by hour. In turn, rifle in hand, Morton peered down the glens. Far in the east a glimmer of dawn appeared, when dropping shots down in the ravines told of the approach of the enemy's vanguard. The bugles quickly roused the camp. Coffee simmered on a hundred fires; jerked beef, cassava bread, plantains, and rum enlivened the swarthy, half-dressed natives.

Morton divided his now scanty stores with his fellow-adventurers, filled his flask and canteen, and, with a double belt of cartridges, his revolver belted on and his shooting-coat pockets filled with precious Winchester ammunition, prepared for action, keeping the best of his

Indians near him, with all his reserve supplies. Don Fernando was away with the headquarters. His surest safety was there. In an hour, by the growing daylight, hundreds of dark forms were seen flitting through the forest below. Coming nearer, the linen coats of the confident invaders made a conspicuous mark. The troops were now on their lines, and the four little squads of Americans filed off silently to their posts. They were the advanced riflemen of the army.

Firing now ran briskly along a mile or more of the hills and gullies, in snapping, irregular bursts. The officers of the camp held back their *machête* men, half-crazed with rum, and too eager to run in and close with their exhausted enemies, who had climbed the long ridge. Lying behind the piled stones and log shelters, the fifteen Americans around the silent Gatlings picked off man after man, with their superior long-range rifles.

In half an hour, Morton, now cool and collected, heard the scream of a shell for the first time, as the only light artillery battery of the enemy opened on the shelter of the Gatlings, held in reserve for short-range work.

"Treachery!" Morton cried to his neighbor, as a storm of rifle balls swept them from the flank. It was indeed so. Some timorous deserter had unfolded the hidden position of the machine-guns. Quickly run back over the ridge, they were soon safe. The Gatlings were held for the wild rush of the onset.

Louder rang the rattling fire along the lines. The officers passed down Bogran's positions, cheering the men. Not an inch had been gained by the enemy. The foe in numbers began finally to envelope Bogran's troops, and the flanks were drawn back, fighting in a semicircle.

In another hour, the cool deadly marksmanship of the American contingent began to tell. A body of yelling men gathered on the opposite knoll, four hundred yards away, and dashed around as the American riflemen

streamed back behind the ridge. "Hurry up the Gatlings!" was the cry. In three minutes, the fearful rattle of the deadly machine-guns woke the forest echoes; for, pouring back, leaving a trail of dead and dying, the revolutionists broke under the terrific fire. The Gatlings must be disabled, to save the revolutionists.

So, in a quarter of an hour, on a bald knoll, the three rifled guns of the foe rang out their bellowing voices. The bursting shells threw the loose hill-side rocks high in air.

A general yell for "*Los Americanos y sus riflés!*" resounded. Stealing out, behind trees, the American sharpshooters poured in a hot, withering fire from their Winchesters, Sharps, old Springfields, and Hotchkiss guns on the enemies' gunners. Firing by squads of five, under signal, the rifled guns were soon silenced. Their gun detachments were lying prone around them. With defiant cheers, the head of a column poured over the ridge once more. Desperate officers at their head, led them on with mad bravery. With a jump the Gatlings crowned the knoll once more, opened, and the column broke. When within a hundred yards, Morton, behind a huge pine-tree on the flank of the Gatlings, saw the fugitives scatter to the rear, yet not before he recognized dare-devil Tom Overton. He was brandishing a rifle, and urging on the dark-faced demons.

Even in the excitement of the fight, Morton laughed a cold devil's laugh. Here was his own enemy at last. It was no longer Bogran's quarrel. It was not his own life. It was vengeance, and Marie Ashton, he fought for. For Overton, behind a tree, was sending shot after shot coolly into the ranks of the defenders of the Gatlings. Had he recognized him? No.

"Look here, Roberts," Morton cried to his nearest skirmish neighbor. "See that big fellow behind the tree?"

"Yes," Roberts—the chance acquaintance of a day—called out.

"You take the left of the tree—I take the right. Now call off *one*, *two*: you're *one*, I'm *two*. Shoot when you see him on your side. We must get him. He led that charge. If he leaves the tree, pump away at him. He's an officer."

The unequal duel continued for five minutes. Splinters flew from the pine's bark. Overton's hat appeared to right and left. After several shots, he seemed to understand the game. His tree was silent.

"I guess he's done for," cried Roberts. "You are good for him now!" And he picked out fleeing stragglers along the breaking line.

It was now shot and shot. Morton and Overton, face to face at last!

Morton was as cool as in the gallery, and his blood still boiled for vengeance. The ring of snapping shots was interrupted as Bogran's left wing, advancing, swept down the hill, with wild yells, on the foe. The Olancheros, *machête* in hand, closed in like leaping panthers, covered by the heavy rifle-fire. They were at close quarters now, slashing the wounded as they passed. Morton's eye was glued on the tree. He had a bead drawn on its centre. As the *rancheros* streamed over the hollow, Morton saw a head and shoulder. He pressed the trigger gently, and the dark form, throwing up its hands, pitched forward on its face. As the whole line of Bogran's troops drove along in triumph, with mad yells, Harry Morton marched straight on the tree, his rifle at the ready—for the screams and howls down the slopes told that the *machête* was effectively doing its fearful work.

With beating heart, Morton approached the tree. The Americans did not join in the massacre after the rout. Roberts called out, springing to the front to see the last

of the retreat: "There's your man. You got him at last."

It was, indeed, Tom. Precisely in the centre of his forehead, the heavy Winchester express ball had entered. It was Thomas Overton—swarthy, worn, bearded, and stone dead.

"By God! this man's an American," Roberts cried, returning, for the rally was sounding, and the wild *rancheros*, with the mounted men, were finishing the butchery of the fleeing enemy. Aides dashed around, driving the lean-armed swordsmen to the front.

"*Vamos por el capital!*" was the watchword.

Bogran mustered his solid troops, and was pushing at once on the capital. Leaving a rear-guard to bring on the heavy goods, bury the dead, and glean the field, the main body pressed on to secure the city at once. Half of the Americans remained. Fatigued with his terrible journey, and worn out with excitement, Morton decided to rest. Calling his Indian servants, who clung to him, through fear, Morton brought Overton's body into camp, with the still heated rifle he had handled.

"I must search his body for any papers," the banker reflected. "He has paid off my score, but I have a right to know the truth."

No one objected to his proposed burial of the American guerilla. From his own luggage Morton extracted clean garments, and by the Indian servants, Tom Overton, the sport of adverse fortune, was buried in a grave—hollowed by the all-useful *machête*—on the red hill-side of Honduras.

Morton shuddered after this ordeal. Dead, and by his avenging hand! He sat under the swaying pines, and dreamed it was a mere vision of the night. In a little heap, all of Overton's belongings lay before him.

"He would naturally secrete his papers in prison."

In half an hour, the amateur soldier possessed every trifle of the dead man. There was nothing save a few pocket articles.

"He must have had something else," Morton reasoned. A flash of memory recalled old-time stories. Carefully examining the dead man's clothing and shoes, he found nothing. When he handled the coat, Morton smiled as he noted its bulk. Severing the seams of the lining with his knife, he laid bare the concealed treasure—bill after bill, till the last was secured. Sewed inside one pocket lining was a small memorandum book; in the other, two old letters.

There was but little time. Stripping the whole clothing with his knife, he burned it all. The rear-guard was now ready to march toward the capital, where *fiesta* and rejoicing awaited them. His nimble Indians packed the animals.

"Overton must have left the great bulk of the treasure with the woman," Morton said, as he mounted and joined the Americans filing down the blood-stained slopes. He cast a last look at the red mound, with its two stakes at head and foot. "Paid in full! It was in fair fight and an even duel."

A cold chill fell over Harry Morton's heart. "I have no object in life now. It's all a fraud, a snare, a lie. Overton was only a fearless thief. Marie Ashton is a lying adventuress, and I am—I am—a shallow fool!"

He cared not now for the score of thousand dollars he had rescued. The book and letters he had not yet examined. Five hours' swift riding, over fairly practicable roads, brought him to the white-walled town of Tegucigalpa. Behind on the battle-field, the wandering starving camp-followers were gleaning the field, and the mountain vultures perched patiently, awaiting another dawn. Along the road, the dead and wounded told of the fearful work of the razor-bladed native sword.

Halted at the outposts, the *Americanos—los bravos*—were passed in triumph. Bogran was already beleaguering the town.

The town, still held by the desperate rebels as a last stand, lay now before them. To the north, old Leona, a dangerous volcano, towered over the city, around whose stone walls dropping shots, wild yells, and lurid dancing lights told of the leaguer. The frightened scattered Americans and scientific laborers of the mines were flocking in, and seeking safety in joining Bogran's forces. Penned up like rats, within a wall of fire, the desperate revolutionists died with the aimless *sang-froid* of the Latin races. Temper, not temperament, rules these mercurial men.

President Bogran, with his gold-lace bedizened staff, wildly urged the avengers on. The silent *machête* was at work. Pistol and rifle rang out, as the human *débris* of the unsuccessful revolution were coldly assassinated in the suburbs. The captured cannon of the defeated *pronunciados* were playing on the long, low adobe houses, whose dazzling white walls were a shining mark. Sortie after sortie was met by the concentrated fire of Bogran's victorious battalions. The Americans now stood coldly aloof. Their day of butchery was over. In the narrow cobble-stoned streets of the mountain capital, only wide enough for the two-wheeled carts, the flying, panic-stricken revolutionists were brutally massacred. Before the cross of God—lifted high over the old Spanish cathedral—yelling fugitives were dragged out and fusil-laded at the nod of a mere corporal. Heavy window shutters, iron-barred, kept the shrinking fifteen thousand citizens safe in their homes, while from every hole and corner the more ambitious malcontents were dragged, wounded and bleeding, to the inevitable death awaiting them on the Plaza de las Armas. For Bogran, coward in fight, was as merciless in victory as a Scylla—

and Morton had to see this human holocaust go on without a word in protest.

Bogran shot his rivals on the ground he may some day die on later.

Before three days, President-General Bogran triumphantly reoccupied the Executive Palace, and Morton, with a horrid fascination he could not resist, saw six of the would-be Napoleons shot to death, amid the execration of the mob. He had as yet disguised his own identity. No man knew of his private vengeance. Only waiting till the last malefactors were dragged from their lair, till the telegraph was available, Harry Morton telegraphed Seth Wise, *via* Truxillo :

Thomas Overton, *alias* Robert Randall, killed in battle near capital. Small sum recovered. Woman and funds probably in Europe. Leave to-morrow for Pacific Coast. Home *via* San Francisco.

Before the next night, Mrs. Eleanor Laurence, at the American Exchange, Paris, received the news of Overton's death from the Truxillo agent of José Oliviera; and Don José, with the cheerful Riley, breathed freer in the same knowledge. Overton's "fitful fever" was over. It was safety for the two rascals !

Several Americans wished to quit at once this land of blood and yellow fever. Morton, after waiting a day or so, to see the roads safe, indited full letters to Wise, and despatched them to the Atlantic coast by the first Government escort. Carefully copying the entries in the memorandum book, he sent on the original, under seal, and guarded the two letters. For the truth was clear to him at last. He only lived now to chase across the Old World the fair, deceitful devil who had lured him on to ruin. The book had but few entries. The first was a complete copy of the bank combination; the second was a series of figures, as follows :

Bonds.

5)250,000
50,000
50,000 O. 100,000 O.
50,000 C.
50,000 R.

Currency.

5)140,000
28,000
28,000 O. 56,000 O.
28,000 C.
28,000 R.

C. 50,000 bonds, 28,000 curr.; $\frac{1}{3}$ each of $\left\{\begin{matrix} 50{,}000 \text{ b.} \\ 28{,}000 \text{ c.} \end{matrix}\right\}$.

The next was as follows :

Left	116,500	bonds with M. A.
	64,500	curr.
Less	18,000	
	46,500	curr., M. A.

Loose money in baggage.

"This is clearly the division of the plunder with his fellow-thieves. Seth Wise must trace them down and find them." As for the two letters, they were burned into his brain.

One was dated six years before it trembled in the hand of the love-sick wanderer. It told of a woman's shame—of an abandoned home—of all that makes life a hell to the burdened conscience. It was filled with the reproaches of a wanton and the quavering pleading of a dupe. Harry Morton's bosom heaved in agony as he knew, at last, he had been the plaything of an incarnate devil and had lavished his perverted love on a human hyena.

For the second letter, written in the same hand—while he wandered in a fools' paradise—was a merry, rallying description of his own volunteer confessions, a statement

of his daily actions, and a report of the sly manœuvres which had dragged him down. "The poor fool has no idea, yet, of any scheme. He believes in me implicitly. He does not even suspect you." Both were signed "Kate." Such was his darling's description of her banker-lover. His bosom heaved in fury.

"Curse her!" cried Morton, as he sprang on his fresh horse; for two days would bring him to the blue Pacific. "I'll comb the earth till I find her and face her with these damning proofs. As for the stolen money, she shall yield it up. I have been a dupe and fool."

He shivered in impotent rage as he thought of his royal volunteer gift to her. Twenty thousand dollars!

Out from old Tegucigalpa, with its bowers and fountains, its great plaza, its old quadrangles of quaint buildings—on past the crumbling churches, the jails now crowded with starving delinquents, having said a hasty adieu to his motley companions of the chance battle, Harry Morton sped away, well mounted on a good horse. He must be away to Europe, to find Marie Ashton, he thought as he went on, clattering down a good road to the blue seas of the West.

His heart and soul were fixed on one thing—to return, to throw himself at his wife's feet and tell the true tale of his folly. He vowed to exculpate Ralph Burnham from his quarrels, and to place in the hands of clear-eyed old Seth Wise the means of tracing and recovering the lost fortune of Claire. He longed to begin and live his life over, as a man. The scales had dropped from his eyes, and he knew at last the hideous folly of his ways. Far away from the blood-stained streets of the mountain capital their nimble steeds bore the returning travellers, sweeping down the slopes of the hundred miles to the Pacific.

When Morton drew his rein before the little hotel in Amapala, he staggered as he dismounted. His faithful

Indians unpacked the luggage. With trembling hand he paid them, and dismissed them, with unwonted largesse, and presents for Don Fernando, whose florid adieu still lingered with him. Don Fernando was conspicuous at the executions of the malcontents, calmly smoking his cigarette. Three hours afterward, Robinson, a fellow traveller, joyously burst into Morton's room to announce the arrival of the San Francisco steamer next day. Morton was lying, fully dressed, on his bed, his face flushed, his breathing labored. The household was summoned. The old Spanish doctor gravely gazed at him, and remarked, "*Está muy enfermo.*"

When the gravity of his sickness was announced, Robinson cried, "What is it?"

With bated breath, the aged physician remarked, "*El vomito.*"

It was, indeed, yellow fever in its deadliest form. With strangers around his bedside, his glazed eyes feebly strained to catch a familiar face, Henry Morton calmly laid down the burden of a stormy life. Without a word he passed out upon the dark sea of Death, and his grave was made in the little Campo Santo by the green-clad shores of the island-dotted bay.

The American Consul seized the occasion to write an eloquent despatch to the Department of State, and took official possession of his funds and papers. A telegram to Seth Wise followed an examination of his note-book.

While one saddened woman knelt in sorrow in her lonely New York home, Marie Ashton in Paris gazed cheerfully into her fire.

The American Consul in Truxillo, forwarding the despatch to New York, imparted the sinister news of Morton's death to the Commandante and to Oliviera's agent.

"Another American gone! They cannot resist our climate," exclaimed the three cronies.

All need of silence being now removed, the Consul, to whom Morton had imparted his mission and identity, revealed all.

Oliviera's agent laughed to himself, as he telegraphed to Paris and to New York the news of Morton's taking off.

"A very good thing for us!" joyously exclaimed Oliviera and Riley. "This fellow could have made trouble. Now, we are safe at last—thanks to the climate."

"I can now defy any fate," cried Marie Ashton, as the cable message fluttered down to her feet in her Parisian rooms. Stretching in comfort on her *chaise-longue*, she caught the reflection of her blooming charms in the glass. "I am young, rich, independent, and I am no longer in fear of poor Tom's desperate rashness, or crazy Morton tracking me down. But I must get away from Paris. I'll go away to the East. I'll try the Mediterranean. I'll see Egypt, for I might be recognized even here. People from Denver—old friends from the South—some one, would see me. There will be a scurry over these things. But I have the wealth, the power—I have a new name," Eleanor Laurence lightly laughed, as she thought of her passport registry, "and it would take one from the dead to break my lines now."

Merciless, heartless, loveless, and drinking the wine of life to the dregs, Eleanor Laurence was in the rosy dreams of wealth and success—Marie Ashton was no more. And yet a finger from the dead world was pointed at her, as she dreamed of her luxurious trip through the sparkling island-dotted waters of the old Roman world.

CHAPTER XIII.

HAGGERTY SEES A LOVELY VISION. MAXWELL'S COLORADO JOURNEY. IN CAIRO. JOHN MARTIN'S BRIDE. IN THE BOIS. "TWO GENTLEMEN FROM NEW YORK." AN OLD LOVE-STORY. "I WANT THOSE BONDS."

"I AM getting stiff and old, my young friends," said Seth Wise, gazing over his dinner table at Burnham and Maxwell.

It was a bleak February day, and the fluttering snowflakes whirled down on the avenue. It was a "firm dinner." For Walter Maxwell was now a neophyte banker. Seth, in deep dejection, found his time occupied with the arrangement of poor Harry Morton's estate, and the care of the lonely wailing woman whose pale face gleamed like marble from the sombre weeds of a widow.

Claire Morton was sullen and stunned. The whole sad history seemed like a horrid dream. Doctor Atkinson, gravely gleaning his professional fields, remarked to the old banker: "You must cheer her up, my dear sir; she needs daily care. She must be taken out and roused from this crushing sorrow."

So it came to pass that Seth became a temporary resident of Claire Morton's home, and Burnham and Maxwell occupied the stately mansion of the old capitalist. Both of them were busied at the bank. With singular delicacy, Burnham avoided his widowed cousin, and, throwing off his lethargy, took upon himself the burden of the bank business, in which Walter Maxwell aided the two partners.

The last sad reminders of the erring, passionate Harry Morton were his manly letters from Tegucigalpa; the mysterious pocket-book of the dead gambler, with its

record of unpunished robbery; and the arrival of Henry Morton's funds and effects.

"Maxwell, I feel that we can trace down the gang of sly villains by finding and vigorously pressing that blonde she-devil," said the old man. "Now that we have the bank affairs moving in good shape, I will advise Burnham as manager daily. I know we have all the general data we can get. There is nothing more from Overton or poor Harry to be hoped," he said with a sigh. "I wish you to go quietly out to Denver and trace back this man Overton's career, and this wandering woman's dark history. It will give us the key-notes. Your experience as an 'interviewer' and traveller will stand you in good stead," the old man said, with a faint attempt at pleasantry. "We can only strike these people here through facts gleaned from her. We have as yet no legal evidence against them, but she is the key to the whole situation. Explore this double history, and we can easily find her in Europe. Let the police alone, out West, but search thoroughly in the Bohemian haunts of speculation, gaming, and sport, in Denver and Leadville."

Four days afterward, Walter Maxwell stepped from the train at Denver. Knocking around the world had given him a knack at an easy-going life. He was a good hand at billiards, a cheerful story-teller, also a fair card-player. His personal *bonhomie* and his social gifts made him welcome in the free and easy West. Maxwell strolled about the town for a half-hour before he decided on his resting-place. With the freemasonry of his journalistic craft, he had picked up already on the train a social directory of the lofty mining capital. In two hours, he was installed in private rooms, over Denver's most seductive drinking saloon.

Sport and miner, overdressed drummer and wandering adventurer—all the shady side of town life which lounges by day, and dices, games, or drinks, at night—

were the *habitués* of this chief haunt of the man about town.

Lounging, driving, frequenting the music-halls and smaller places of amusement—the ex-journalist became soon a general favorite. His money was freely spent—an open sesame in Denver. After a week, he gained a seat at the "confidential card game" in the back room—a brevet of social rank!

The emissary of Seth Wise had only so far progressed as to discover that Overton's false despatches had been handled at Denver by others. This was confirmation, but still useless as a help to future action.

Fearing that Tom Overton might have yet friends on the watch, Maxwell refrained from mentioning his name.

"I must do it, though," he resolved finally. "It's the only way."

As the diamond-bedizened barkeeper deposited a round of inviting drinks, one day, at the card-table, Maxwell carelessly asked: "Do you know a Denver mining man named Tom Overton?"

There was an instant response from the three players, as well as the modern Ganymede.

"Tom Overton—one of the 'old timers'!"

"Overton's a first-rate, rattling good fellow."

"Tom's the best judge of a horse or a poker hand in the West."

"He's the sharpest operator in Colorado."

"Where is he now?" Maxwell calmly queried.

"Oh, he's somewhere East, or in Europe, handling some big properties. He has a finger in every pie." They knew not that he was cold in death.

He had played his last card, and Death had won the odd trick!

The floodgates once loosened, the tide of comment and reminiscence rolled along. Maxwell watched his glass and the cards, while blue smoke-wreaths floated around

the players. Overton's early exploits on the Mississippi, his adventures on the plains, his prowess in duel and mining squabbles, his varied fortunes over the green cloth or in the Stock Exchange—all these marvels were lazily recounted.

"By the way," said Colonel Merriman, a heavy-browed idle lawyer, who was fonder of poker than of Blackstone, "I wonder what Tom ever did with Walton's wife. She was a rare beauty."

"Ah! Tom was a ladies' man?" Maxwell questioned, giving the ball of conversation a toss.

"I should say he was," the bibulous advocate proudly rejoined. "I came very near getting shot over that same blue-eyed beauty."

"How was that?" several of the circle questioned.

"Kate Walton's mother was of a very good family in New Orleans. After the war, she had to take boarders—the broken gentlewoman's last resource. Tom was always in and out of the town. When the girl Kate grew to be sixteen or seventeen, she was just a picture. The poor child—from sentiment—married Walton, a good-looking young clerk. After a year or two, he took to drink and opium. Overton boarded at the old lady's house. It's the same old story. The young wife was neglected, and she was fond of dress and show—the Devil's bait for women. One day, Overton turned up with her at Leadville. He opened a 'quiet game.' She was the star of the town. He taught her to ride, and dress, and show herself off. The whole town knew her as 'Colorado Kate.' Many's the man who fell down before her bright eyes—and Overton fleeced them well. One day, Walton—who was, by the way, no coward—turned up here, with a big six-shooter. Overton shot him in the shoulder. Walton came near dying. Tom put him, then, in a private hospital, and sent the woman East for a year or two to polish up."

"He must have adored her," Maxwell hazarded.

"So he did. When he got into big operations, she came back to Denver, under the name of Mrs. Marie Ashton. Overton was now up in finance and a very important man. His reputation as a desperate killing man kept people very careful. She gradually went in pretty fair society for a mining camp—you all know!" The *convives* smiled and slyly winked.

"Is she here now?" Maxwell asked, with languid interest.

"No, but I heard from some business men who went East that she is living 'very swell' in New York. She was the Belle of Colorado."

"And the wounded husband?" Maxwell queried.

"After he recovered, he dropped back into his opium habit. He came up here and wanted me to take her away from Overton. He showed me the marriage certificate, and all. I ventured to go and see Tom. I shall never forget that visit." The counsellor paused and emptied his glass.

"He wouldn't give her up?" Maxwell said, with a show of interest.

"Tom quietly pointed to a pair of six-shooters, lying on his table," Merriman continued. "I took the hint and left, for he said something about filling any man full of lead who disturbed his 'domestic arrangements.'"

The gay circle laughed merrily at the nonplussed lawyer.

"Didn't get the lady back?" they roared.

"Not much! If Tom comes back you can all try it," Merriman retorted, "if you think it a safe deal."

"No, thank you!" an emphatic chorus answered.

"Where's the husband now?" Maxwell demanded. "To finish your strange history, we should know his fate."

"Oh, Walton's down in Leadville, in the county clerk's office, just about the same. He'll never give her a di-

vorce, for he don't wish Tom to marry her. Poor fool! he thinks she'll come back to him yet. She's not twenty-four now, and the men who saw her say she's lovelier than a dream."

Two days later, Walter Maxwell left Leadville for New York, with a certified copy of Kate Walton's marriage certificate, and a complete family history. Walton himself was easily beguiled with a story of some prospective landed inheritance in Louisiana. Maxwell found him easily, yet guarded her secrets.

"The coast is clear," Walter mused, "for the mother is now dead. We can frighten her with these papers."

Arriving in New York, Maxwell had formulated his whole plan on the way. His jolly friends in Denver looked eagerly for his return. He promised Walton to communicate through Colonel Merriman, should that worthy long survive the effects of copious whiskey at a high altitude.

"Bravo!" cried Seth Wise, as the three friends sat in conclave. "Now, Walter, read these." The old man handed over a telegram and letter. "These are from Haggerty."

It was so. The wandering reporter and his sharp-eyed bride were wide awake in France. The cablegram read:

Saw the woman alone here at the American Exchange. Followed her. Registered as Mrs. Eleanor Laurence. Left Grand Hotel last night by Marseilles train. Cable your orders. Letters by to-morrow's steamer. HAGGERTY.

"Here's my answer," Wise remarked, as he handed over the copy. It read:

Wait in Paris for further instructions by letter.—WISE.

"Now, Maxwell, this letter arrived yesterday. We both waited for you," Wise quietly said. "I cabled the

United States Consul at Marseilles, and here's his official answer :

"Mrs. Eleanor Laurence sailed for Alexandria, Egypt, three days ago. "VERNON, *Consul.*"

"Ah ! my lady is afraid to trust Paris after seeing Haggerty. Now, I would write confidentially to some good bank in Cairo or Alexandria. You have correspondents there. She probably will pass the rest of the winter there. Have them use the cable. Then we can send some one on to watch or frighten her." Maxwell thus laid down his views.

"It's a very good scheme," cried Seth. "She will be on the look-out for Haggerty and wife. She is now aroused and watchful. We can't get her back, but we must corner her."

"If she will stray back to the Continent, I think we can get her in a trap," Maxwell replied. "I have a scheme, but she must first get into good society. That is her aim now."

"Burnham," said Seth, "it will take a month to get this answer from Cairo. We have old relations with our correspondent there on account of our winter tourists. I'll write in full to-night. Now, I'll take a run of three or four weeks down to Florida, and take Claire Morton where she won't be reminded every day of this trouble. You can wire me when the answer comes. I will come back, and we will send some one over. Our bird is shy and must not be frightened. Now, study that letter of Haggerty's, and tell me what to write him."

Burnham and Maxwell dissected the scribe's epistle.

Marie Ashton had recognized both of them. She evidently knew the late Miss Viola Pomeroy as the deft spy of Harlem. Blooming in beauty, exquisitely dressed, with her colored maid in the carriage, the witch measuredly retired to her hotel. Ed. Haggerty, strolling into

the Grand Hotel court that evening, saw a liberal hillock of her baggage departing for the night train. Studying the register, and an inquiry, proved that "Mrs. Eleanor Laurence and maid" had left for Marseilles, ordering her letters: "Poste Restante, Cairo, Egypt."

While Uncle Seth wrote to Cairo, Burnham advised Haggerty to follow any further clews, using the necessary time and means, and to await the arrival of some confidential agent. For the astute Haggerty sent in the prospectus of a new "Literary and Commercial American Agency," he having found some bright-witted adventurer from Columbia's shores to join him. "I intend to remain here," he proudly announced.

While drifting snows buried New York City, and bleak March winds howled along the frozen streets, Eleanor Laurence, in far Cairo, sat upon the upper porticos of the Grand Esbekieh Hotel, in all the mild glow of a Cairene sun. Far away up the blue Nile the sandy shores were dotted with brick pyramids. The great band of tender green verdure stretched like a gigantic ribbon below her. As the breeze fanned her lovely brow, the wandering Witch listened to the shouts of the motley throng below. Beside the palatial hostelry the orange-laden trees of a pacha's garden hung over the walls. The perfumed breeze at night, sweeping into her open casement, echoed with the passionate plaint of the nightingale. The beautiful American wayfarer was at her ease. Safe now from all prying eyes, in this dreamy lotos-land, her Southern nature took on again the easy nonchalance of the land of her girlhood. Cairo charmed her, with its ebb and flow of the social world-girdlers: its quaint narrow streets—its mysterious gardens, where Fatima and Haroun-al-Raschid might even yet lurk in spirit. Driving down the Shoubrah in the lovely afternoons, her faithful maid in attendance, *la belle Américaine* was

the cynosure of all eyes. Dapper French counts, ponderous German barons, smirking Italian princes, *blasé* English officers, and keen-eyed wandering Americans turned to gaze after this sweet-faced woman whose violet eyes and golden hair were the sensation of the social hour.

"Who is she? What is she?" resounded on all sides.

Perfect in her dress, with her cold reserve and self-contained manner, the unknown goddess ruled a court of eager admirers from a chilling distance. Her easy luxury and perfect surroundings spoke of wealth and position. Yet the whisper grew, "Why is she always alone?"

All unconscious of the general attention, Eleanor Laurence gazed on the mighty pyramids of Ghizeh, wandered at the base of the great Sphinx, or strayed—a brilliant modern beauty—through the lovely gardens of Boulak, where the silver-veiled ladies of the Harem shyly parted the spiced bowers and blossoming rose-vines to gaze on the Frankish Daughter of Light. Discreetly accompanied by reliable *valets-de-place* from the hotel, the ex-belle of Denver daily explored the dim Mouski, and chaffered with the grave-faced Arab merchants, in its picturesque gloom, for pearls, rare scarfs, and all the riches of the unequalled kaleidoscopic bazaars of the mystic old town. Dreaming away day after day, she lingered in the quaint winter city where the whole world pours up and down the palm-shaded avenues—in a polyglot parade. From the battlements of the frowning citadel she marked, with delighted eye, the great city, with its embowered gardens, its grand mosques of fanciful Arabic architecture—their huge domes sharp cut against the bluest sky over the earth—their pencilled minarets piercing the thin upper air, whence the voice of the muezzin fell "like the accents of an angel voice."

Alone, and yet not alone! In the world, yet dreaming, seeking self-forgetfulness, Marie Ashton, at night, hid her fair face with her hands as she thought of Tom Overton's lonely death in the far Honduras hills. She could see him again as he waved his last adieu—strong, alert, his form wrapped in manhood's highest mantle of courage, strength, and desperate resolve.

Morton's gloomy shade, too, was a memory. In what lonely hour did his passionate spirit take wing? In a far-off land—his own thoughts goading him on, unthinking of his doom? Marie knew only of the deaths—the brief words of the telegrams. All else was merely conjecture. She banished away these haunting visions, and sought to think herself clean-handed—innocent of those two untimely deaths. And yet it had to come. Her whole life had been only "parting," and a panorama of scenes which made her lonely hours fearsome. "At least, I was wise not to answer anything. No one can ever trace me from that horrible Central American shore."

The silvery Nile wooed her to its mystic shores: Marie was under a spell, as she sailed up, on a princely dahabieh, toward mighty Karnak and Luxor, toward the Cataracts—the history-haunted upper gates of Egypt. There the priceless jewel of olden cycles—beautiful, lonely Philæ—lies, its silent temple the century-hallowed Bride of the Past. Her life glided by as a vision in a glass. Day by day, her beauty mellowing in the rest and ease of these delightful days, Marie Ashton grew into a newer life, a fresher loveliness, and a forgetfulness of the stormy past. Her vague, haunting fears of the future vanished, hour by hour, and her blooming cheek was as delicate in its rosy flush as the morning skies she sailed under.

At the Ezbekieh she had noted a staid, self-possessed American of sixty, who bore himself with the ease of a veteran traveller. On her dahabieh the same voyager was,

strange to say, a fellow-passenger. Fanny, with ready colored sagacity, noted the quiet steadiness with which his keen eyes ever followed her mistress. Mr. John Martin was a retired California miner, who sought in travel and rest a relief from the results of early hardship. The chattering maid gradually learned all the details of Mr. Martin's career. The whole Western slope was known to him. His wealth was undoubted. His unassuming manner marked him as an exceptional "Argonaut," in that sense of repose, which so many Western men strangely lack. A world-weary, tired man, he lived now only for quiet enjoyment and to see that great world for whose delights and luxuries he had toiled years on sandbar and in the fastnesses of the Sierras. Little courtesies of the voyage brought them together. Marie Ashton—as Eleanor Laurence—recognized many friends and familiar scenes in the stories he told her of his life and wanderings. Simple, kindly, and unaffected, the elderly Othello doted on this Western Desdemona. With no fulsome compliment, without boyish eagerness, he made himself absolutely necessary to her daily life. Days glided into weeks. Night by night, this strangely assorted couple watched the stars sink into the Libyan Desert, or sat under the Nile-glow in the peace of the quiet evening hour. The new Eleanor Laurence was touched by his deference—the ready courtesy of a man long separated from women—and his quiet mastery over his surroundings. His life, his struggles, his whole feelings, were all made familiar to her, as the good boat Tewfik Pacha glided down the great historic river along whose shores the tramp of armed hosts has waked the brooding silence from the days of Semiramis, Alexander, and Napoleon, to these later days of the futile British assaults on the unconquered fanatics of the Soudan.

On the night before the arrival at Cairo, John Martin,

quietly and with dignity, laid his lonely heart open to the woman who had charmed him into a newer life. It was a strange friendship, a stranger courtship, a stranger marriage still ; for, two days after the arrival at Cairo, Eleanor Laurence became the wife of the millionnaire voyager.

"We are alone in the world. *You* shall do as you will—go where you please. We can be wanderers, or rest ourselves when we choose," was his proposed plan of action.

While Seth Wise, returning from Florida, read, with wonder and wild astonishment, these social news with his eager young lieutenants, the new-made husband and wife were wending their easy way to Paris for a rest, having seen Constantinople and threaded the island-gemmed Greek sea, lingering at dreamy Venice and wandering through Switzerland, and down the never-forgotten Rhine.

Every day the beautiful wife gained the confidence of her quiet husband. She thought, with a new, proud sense of perfect safety, of his daily care, and feared no future shadow on her path. Overton had always persuaded her Walton was dead. As for the other horrid phantoms of her clouded past—the memories of Overton and Morton—she had locked them in the inner cell of her heart and thrown the key in Lethe's stream. She had reached self-forgetfulness.

Seth Wise, leaving his fair charge, Claire, renewing the roses rapidly on her cheeks in balmy Florida, hastened back to New York, to make a last judicious effort for the recovery of the stolen funds. The old operator feared to drive wary Marie Ashton into flight. She must be handled with silken gloves.

When, on his arrival, he pored over all the Cairo letters, he was amazed. His young counsellors were astounded at the strange marriage. None of them could

measure the incessant craving for some real foundation for the future—for protection and for fixed position—which decided the wandering woman to join her fate with quiet John Martin. She had seen so many vicissitudes, in Overton's desperate games and his wild speculations! The misery of her early life of blighting poverty had branded her younger days.

While this trinity of New York friends plotted against her peace, the new-made Mrs. John Martin rode in the Bois de Boulogne, in fancied impregnability. Yet, even in her hours of comfort, the haunting fear of the old life would rise up. If she should be discovered—horror!

"My God! Martin never shall know all." Death itself would be better than final disgrace in the eyes of the one man who had trusted her with his name, a future fortune, and placed her on a pedestal of outward social respectability.

John Martin was cheerfully busied looking for a suitable house in Paris as a *pied à terre*. Marie, in the Bois, was the envied of the wayfarer. Her equipage—rich, and in excellent taste—spoke only of easy means and permanent luxury. The Hôtel Meurice harbored John Martin and his bride—for the lady shunned the glaring publicity of the Grand Hotel.

While Wise and his aides studied the problem of attacking Marie, the keen eyes of Mrs. Ed. Haggerty recognized once more the once wayward Witch of Harlem.

Haggerty, with chuckles of triumph, cabled all possible details to New York.

"I don't like to lose your help even for a few weeks, but you had better both go," Wise decided. He had now a skeleton of Maxwell's plan. "You are on the right track," he approved. "She must be irritated, frightened, cajoled, threatened, and, if need be, rewarded. She has something to lose now."

And Ralph Burnham feared to tell Wise of his brief love-dream.

On a bright May morning, Ralph Burnham and Walter Maxwell, after a quiet trip, entered the bureau in Paris, where Ed. Haggerty now ministered to the pleasures and business of his travelling countrymen—largely to his own profit. He had gained quite the Parisian air. Fearing that the shy bird might take flight—after a council of war, Haggerty, scenting future large douceurs, shadowed daily the movements of John Martin. But Martin was not the object of attack. The lady and the bonds!

Burnham's ammunition for the coming battle consisted of Overton's note-book. Maxwell's battery was his Colorado notes, and the marriage certificate.

With repressed excitement, the two friends entered the Hôtel Meurice, when notified of John Martin's departure—for a brief trip to London—on business. His mines and properties demanded continual care, even in far-off Europe. The slavery of wealth!

Their cards were sent up, and in five minutes the young ambassadors of the bank were face to face with Mrs. John Martin.

Seated in her private parlor, the bride of the absent millionnaire was calm and watchful. Her first thought, to deny herself to them, was quickly abandoned. "They have easily found me out. I will face them, for they might use that meanest of all coward weapons—the anonymous letter." Even whispered scandal would ruin her. Martin must never know the past.

Defiant and cool, her one guiding thought was that John Martin should be spared.

Burnham's eyes were downcast, and a bright red spot burned on his cheeks. He could not meet the unflinching eye of Marie with his wonted coolness.

Maxwell was a perfect master of his feelings. He eyed both Ralph and the lovely, watchful woman.

"Madam," began Burnham, "you may be easily aware we come to see you on important business. I will be brief, and endeavor not to delay or annoy you." His voice gained steadiness as he proceeded. "We are informed of the death of Mr. Thomas Overton, your one-time guardian. We are aware of your flight from New York with him."

"Pardon me!" coldly said Marie. "I left New York City in a perfectly regular manner, and am not accountable to you. Mr. Overton had no control over my movements."

Burnham flinched a little. "The schooner Restless has now returned. You used an assumed name in your flight. We know of the name Overton also took—'Robert Randall,' and you sailed as 'Mrs. Eleanor Laurence.'"

"We will not discuss that. It is no crime for me to use any part of my family name—if I choose," Marie retorted.

"But the enormous bank robbery on the date of your departure hangs over you both," Burnham hotly said.

"Do you dare to connect me with it?" Marie sternly said.

"Overton was the thief. We have proofs, obtained from his dead body," Burnham fiercely remarked.

"Then seek him—in his distant grave—for your business. Your remarks to me are mere conjecture and mad insult. If you have nothing further to say, I will leave." She rose and faced them. "I defy you to connect me with this or any robbery, by even the faintest shade of suspicion. I have now a protector who shall deal with you."

Maxwell's warning eyes rested on Burnham, who continued to speak. "Pardon me, madam," he proceeded; "I will be very brief. You may not know that Overton, or his gang, murderously assaulted our watchman; that

our chief clerk fell under his fatal influence ; that one of the two unfortunates is a bedridden invalid—almost an idiot—and the other an insane wreck, as the result of this dead devil's work. Now, you accompanied the robber, Overton, to Central America. He was arrested on his first visit to the shore. You retained all his baggage and papers. The plunder, or a large part of it, was left in your hands—for he was almost penniless, when killed. We demand of you, in the name of justice, restitution of the property stolen by him. You *may* have been innocent, till then : you have, or have had, a fortune since in your possession which is the property of our bank."

"And you ask me—" she began.

"To return the bonds and money found by you. We are not anxious to needlessly harass you, but we will use every means to force you to disgorge. The law——"

Marie laughed in his face.

"Your husband shall know all," Burnham hotly cried.

"Coward!" she hissed, springing to her feet. "He will cowhide you for your insult, old as he is! Now listen!" Her eyes flashed. "I am not answerable to you or your friends in any way. I escaped only with my life from a dangerous voyage. I did satisfy myself of Overton's death. I defy you, with your story of a wounded watchman and an insane clerk. I am out of your power—beyond your reach. My private life is my own : and you have no part in it. I defy you, and you can call, at your peril, upon my husband. I have done with you."

"Our agent, Morton, found all the proofs of guilt on Overton's dead body," Burnham resolutely answered. "You shall be forced to give an account of yourself."

"I defy you. I defy him. Where is he?" cried Marie, with a contemptuous ring in her voice.

"He is dead in Honduras, a part of your work," Burnham almost shouted.

Maxwell watched the face of the beautiful woman at bay. It never changed a muscle. "Great heavens! what an actress!" he murmured.

"I knew not of his death. I care not. What was he to me?" Her voice had a desperate ring in it.

"He was your—" Burnham's voice died away, as Marie glanced at him with an infinite contempt. He felt his own weakness here. He writhed under the cold scorn of that glance. It recalled the past!

She turned, with the air of a conquering queen, to leave the room. Maxwell's voice broke the silence for the first time. "Madam," said he, "permit me, a moment. Will you listen to a few words from *me?*"

She was touched by his moderation. Seating herself, she said quietly, "Proceed."

Burnham, baffled and ashamed, gazed at the speakers.

"I have just returned from a little visit to some old friends in New Orleans," Maxwell softly said—Marie started slightly—"and in Leadville and Denver." He paused. Her blazing eyes were now steadily fixed on him. "I learned there, with deep regret, of the death of Mr. Overton, whom I had no reason to connect with this robbery. I saw many of his old friends there. They were astonished at his tragic end."

Marie was bewildered by this apparent kindness.

"I would be happy to know him innocent. I believe you are the only person who could relieve his memory from such a stain."

She was growing interested.

"I know you know of his life for some years past. I will tell you a little story about a woman who, probably, will claim any property Mr. Overton left."

"Ah!" she quietly sneered. "I presume, some Colorado friend."

"Precisely," he answered gently. "Kate Walton!"

Marie was now gazing at him with blanched cheeks.

Her eyes were glued on the speaker. In a monotone, he briefly recounted the whole history of her own life, to her arrival in New York. Burnham, with cold malignity, watched her growing agitation. When the recital was finished, she cast a despairing glance at Maxwell.

"Who told—you—this nonsense?" she faltered.

"Walton himself," Maxwell answered, flashing a determined glance at her.

Marie reeled and staggered. "Walton! My God! he's dead," she almost yelled.

"I saw him at Leadville, not a month and a half ago," Maxwell replied calmly. "He is in the county clerk's office as a deputy, and I am in daily communication with him."

The new-made wife of John Martin swayed to and fro in anguish.

"I don't wish to distress you, but you see," Maxwell continued, "there is such a thing as bigamy. Your hold on John Martin is now nothing. Your marriage is void. He is innocent, but *you*—are—in a very dangerous position. Think of this."

The excited woman paced the floor and wildly cried: "Overton lied to me. He deceived me."

Like a stroke of lightning, this news shattered her new-built palace of delight. In the power of her enemies, now, with no hold on the dignified and trusting man she had married—it was a master-stroke of fate.

Maxwell approached her kindly. "We will call after dinner. Think this thing over. See what you can do for us. Now, to show you my power: Here is a copy of your marriage certificate to Walton. The certified copy, attested by the State Department, is under lock and key in this city. There is no need to harass John Martin. I leave your own domestic affairs to your conscience," he said gravely.

Marie, the vanquished Witch of Harlem, staggered to

her room, as the emissaries of Wise, the avengers of Morton, left. With staring eyes she gazed into vacancy—till the shadows fell over Notre Dame. Faithful Fanny forced her to take a semblance of nourishment. Her every faculty was strained to its utmost tension. "He shall meet a dead wife on his return—if this disgrace becomes public. I must find a way out."

Rapidly unravelling the seams of her corset, she took out a letter quilted in its folds. It was Overton's memorandum of the bonds and their numbers, made on the Restless. Her eyes flashed with a sudden light.

"I am not as helpless as they would think. Here are all the numbers of all the bonds. They have not got them. Tom told me so. How can they identify them? Morton and Overton are both dead. I will be their only help to recover the cash and bonds left in New York. They cannot know—they do not know—their numbers. But if I give them the bonds, they may punish me. We will see." Her mind was excited to its utmost tension.

Yes, it was true. Overton had given her the list of the bond numbers and destroyed the page in his little notebook. "It's too dangerous to carry around. We've got the bonds, and you can keep the numbers."

"I'll be a little cautious," she murmured. "They are powerless to act without me."

Throwing herself on the couch, she slept till her visitors arrived.

Maxwell was in an uncertain mood, for his pet scheme hung on a hair. Had Marie Ashton any communication with Denver? If so, their hold was slight, for Maxwell's pocket-book contained a cablegram, just received, repeating a New York despatch to him:

> Walton died yesterday at Leadville of consumption.
>
> (Signed) MERRIMAN.

So it was with an armed neutrality—a waiting game

and a wholesome mutual fear—that Maxwell and Marie Ashton faced each other. The two friends were astonished at her cheerful face. They were ashamed to leave to confer privately.

"Mr. Maxwell," Marie began, "as the bank holds me responsible, it seems, for Mr. Overton's property, or a large amount of bonds and money, I ask you if you could identify the bonds. If you have a list of the numbers, I will look at it—as well as the class and denomination of the bonds. You say you have full details from his private memorandum-book. Let me see it."

Maxwell studied her inscrutable face. His heart sank as he thought of the telegram. Did she know of Walton's death? She was a free woman now. Only, Martin could annul the marriage. And his faith, her beauty, her wiles, her pleading, her story of injured innocence!

The two friends were silent.

"I see you have no list of the numbers. Now I will give you a matter to think of. Suppose the securities you seek were largely in New York—how will you recover them? I don't say they are—I say they might be. If you knew where they were, you would not worry me?"

Their faces were blank. It was a new thought. It might be true.

"Where is your proof? Do you need me? Yes, more than I need you." Her voice rang with triumph. "You can let me see the book you speak of. I know Overton's handwriting. As for your gossip about Walton, I have already cabled to Denver. I don't believe he is alive. Until you show me the Overton book, until I have the certified marriage certificate destroyed, I will go no further. You need me more than I need you. Now, come to me to-morrow, at nine. My husband returns to-morrow night. If you do not secure me from scandal, you will never know where the bulk of the property may

be in New York. It is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. You may ruin me, but, by the God above, you will recover no part of your missing funds. I do not believe Walton is alive. I will know soon," cried the quick-witted woman, as they left, to return for a final interview.

Maxwell was speechless. "She will learn the truth."

Burnham and Maxwell burned the midnight oil on this knotty question. Ralph had utterly failed to intimidate her. Maxwell's victory was frustrated by the sudden news of the demise of the man whose shattered system might have succumbed to drink and opium any day for ten years.

"We must compromise," Maxwell said. "She may aid us, if we settle with her. The devil fights steadily on her side. She *is* a witch."

Weary and heavy-eyed, the friends met Marie Martin next day. She swept into the parlor like a grand duchess of the proudest court. Without a word, she laid a cablegram before Maxwell. He read it, and dropped it with a groan. She had received her own despatches from Denver.

"Gentlemen, I am now prepared to negotiate," she said, in a ringing voice.

"What are you willing to do?" said Burnham meekly. She turned her eyes on Maxwell. She instinctively knew the fighting man of the two: Burnham was to her only a human turnip—a mass of mere fibre.

"Mr. Maxwell," the Witch of Harlem said quietly, "did you ever play poker?" Maxwell—with a start—could not deny the soft impeachment. "You have tried to bluff me. I'll play my lone hand against both of you." And Marie Martin, as she forgot "Eleanor Laurence" and "Marie Ashton," for one moment more in her life was fearless "Colorado Kate."

Maxwell gazed on her in undisguised admiration.

Alone and helpless—she was fighting hard for the honor of an old man, who believed her something beyond the stars.

Walter Maxwell had a certain manly strain: he was not altogether proud of the mission he followed.

"What shall we do?" he huskily asked, for Ralph Burnham was, in this, a mere pawn.

"Well, I'll give you the value of one hundred thousand dollars in United States bonds," cried Marie Ashton, "to have that silver-haired old man let alone. But—" her brows were dark.

"Well!" Maxwell coldly replied.

"You are to burn before my eyes the certified copy of that marriage certificate: you are then to hold your dogs off, and I then will post you on the business in New York." She spoke as if Burnham were only a mist of thin blue air. She looked through him—over him. She was only fighting Maxwell.

"I'll talk this over with my friend," said Maxwell.

"Not another word!" cried Marie Ashton. "You lied to me last night. I want no traps laid for me. Decide, or I will recall the offer."

Maxwell knew that she had fathomed their weak point. He walked out for a few moments.

Maxwell's cheek was burning when he returned. "Mrs. Martin—" he began.

"Never mind," she said. "Do you accept?"

He whispered, "Yes."

Then the Witch of Harlem said: "I'll see you now alone. Don't bring *that thing* here. In an hour, I'll be ready."

Mr. Ed. Haggerty's further wiles were now all vain. The Witch of Harlem was fighting for her life. She coldly said to Maxwell: "I will see that marriage certificate burned. I will take a proper document from you. You are to go back to New York at once. I will

accept drafts for the value of the bonds, and deposit the cash here to my banker's order to cover them. But you —and that cringing cur, Burnham—must be over the ocean. He is a poor judge of my relations with Overton. Fool!"

"Won't you give me, now, the lists of the bonds?" Maxwell cried.

She said, with a bound, "Yes, you will get them in New York. I will see you have also a share of this missing property, but you must lay down your arms. Listen!" said she. "I won't have John Martin listen to any coward gabble. By the gods above! I'll kill myself, and you will lose all. Don't forget, Mr. Walter Maxwell, the last thing that I would do is to burn all my papers. Checkmate for you!"

Maxwell said kindly, as he pressed her burning hands: "Let me be your friend. I do not wish to brand you."

"Friend!" she mocked. "Woman is only hunted, like the tiger, for the beauty of her skin. Maxwell," she said, "you have my last word."

"And what have I to trust in?" Maxwell cried.

She whirled on him like a thunderbolt. "Am I not as near to honor as you are? This is my fight to the death. You have the honor of a woman who has met men for years as they are—lovers first, tyrants later, liars always!"

The next evening, Maxwell and Burnham were on the tidal train. They carried the drafts for the value of one hundred thousand dollars in United States bonds—but Marie Martin coldly said adieu. "I have your papers—destroyed. Your word of honor! I will wait, mark you, till I see John Martin is not disturbed. You have no further hold on me. I have given one hundred and twenty-three thousand dollars for his peace of mind." It was true.

Maxwell, in saying good-by, pleaded for the woman

who cherished Harry Morton's memory. The Witch of Harlem lifted her proud head, and said: "I have given you my word. She will be held scatheless. I know the inevitable clearing-house of the fates: Mr. Burnham 'to be husband' *vice* Morton deceased." And she laughed coldly as she strode away. "He will step into Morton's shoes. But you'll not get the numbers of those bonds until you are both in New York." Marie Martin was resolute, and the baffled emissaries were fain to leave Paris quietly.

"One such battle will do, Maxwell," she said sharply. "I don't care to open this matter again."

And all the dreary way across the green, rolling Atlantic, Walter Maxwell wondered what had made Burnham so dumb before the hunted, despairing woman—for Ralph was mute. Their grand coup had partly failed. If John Martin was willing to finish a stormy life with the woman at his side, Maxwell himself felt small at the "breaking of the beautiful butterfly." It was too cowardly work for him.

And when simple John Martin came back from London, he knew not that the tired woman who welcomed him, sick of sin, weary of crime, and worn with intrigue —the woman who lay on his honest breast—prayed never to feel, by his anguish, that he knew what kind of an "angel he had entertained unawares."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE TRAIL. SETH WISE'S BLUFF. FIRST BLOOD FOR RILEY AND OLIVIERA. DELILAH OF HARLEM TO THE RESCUE.

THE two young men conferred while pacing the steamer deck, as they neared New York. Burnham's

brow was sad. He did not feel that he had gained a victor's laurels in his attack upon a friendless, desperate woman. For in his heart he still treasured a childish memory of a story about "casting the first stone." He was no Sir Galahad. He dared not meet Marie Ashton's eye boldly.

Seth Wise—merry and rubicund—waited for the returning emissaries. The magic cable told him of their partial success. The old financier was fairly happy. The delicious excitement of business brought back to him a fresh youth. Claire Morton was at home again, and with blooming cheeks. The roses were now plentiful on dear old Broadway, and the trees in the squares lifted their tender shoots to the warm sunlight of early summer.

"I think I can see a way out of all this," Seth mused. "With Maxwell's brains and Burnham's popularity, the new firm will move along." He had visions of a snuggery of his own, far from ticker and telephone, where he could watch the white sails flit by, and dream of the olden financial fields in which his spurs were gained. With rare inspiration, Seth reasoned: "I have dabbled too much with these young people's lives. I will let things alone a little while, and see how they will swing." For, in his heart of hearts, he had a great compassion for the passionate young man who laid his life down, in Honduras, beguiled by a false woman's smile. Yet Seth Wise knew that the hunt was not of the game, but of the hunter. Morton was the cause of all the tangle—led on by his tempestuous passions!

"Foolish boy!" Seth sadly sighed, as he called back certain tableaux in the private life of his own dear self. "This smart woman was too strong for him, at all points of life's game." Wise, a retired veteran at the game of hearts, could not deny that Morton had gayly entered, as an intrigue of pleasure, into a struggle which cost him life, honor, wife, fortune, and public respect. "Too

late to mend the matter now," he murmured. "Claire! How does she really look back at him?" For she was a daily study to Wise. Wounded vanity, outraged self-respect, narrow-minded jealousy of the successful siren —something kept Claire Morton's head high. She mourned in private, if at all.

"Poor Harry Morton, with all his faults, he was the making of an ideal banker—and—and—as to women," Seth remarked, *sotto voce*, "he was, like all of us—a d——d fool."

A secret pride in Morton's manliness possessed old Seth. The slaying of Overton—his own life laid down on the romantic quest; his straightforward last letters—when his eyes were finally opened, caused old Seth, over his cigar, to drop his head and murmur fondly: "Poor boy! poor boy! Not the first fool who has thrown away all he had, before the erring feet of a careless and unthankful Phryne! This little game of life goes on forever, and will forever."

Yet Seth, with twinges of conscience, could not disguise that Harry Morton trod the rosy path of dalliance and devilish wickedness merely for his own amusement. He was not led away. So the old man wondered, often, why the "missing rib" had brought such fatal fascinations even into our workaday world. His cogitations on these and other points reached the average level of humanity. There still lingered on his own lips certain bitter draughts of the wine of life.

After many sage counsels, Seth delivered his final opinion to the returning ambassadors. "You'll never get the figures and data we want from this woman, unless you act liberally toward her. I will write her myself."

So old Seth opened a discreet correspondence with the watchful Witch, at Paris. It was frank and manly on his part, for the young men brought a secret address, given by the never-sleeping guardian of her own rights. The

daily round of New York life glided along, its undercurrents of tragedy, its deadly whirlpools, as usual, hidden under the smooth surface. Seth was astounded when Marie Morton offered to come to New York, and give her evidence, at the trial—if needed—of the New York accessories. "I should judge," Seth reasoned, "that she has driven this old man almost wild with her enchantments. She seems pretty sure of her position." And still the list of the bonds was not forthcoming.

"I am now armed against any intrusion," she discreetly wrote. "You can do as you wish. If you wish my aid you can have it. I claim one-third of your further recovery on account of the estate." The letters were type-written, and all unsigned. A meaning clause said: "Your young friends know my address."

"Gentlemen, I am going over to London," said Seth Wise, a week later. He was really nonplussed. The dainty Restless was lying at the South Ferry docks. He dared not yet interfere, for the cool woman in Paris baffled his best endeavors. He had no proofs to convict any one yet. He was forced to let the crew sail away quietly. "I don't want to get my name in the newspapers, and be the sensation of a week," the old man growled. "I'll slip away from the boys."

Seth, with many fatherly injunctions, begged Ralph Burnham to watch, in his absence, over Claire Morton. The warning was almost needless. For Burnham's form was apparent, several evenings a week, now, by Claire Morton's fireside.

These things never escaped Seth Wise's sharp eye. "I am not so sure of Burnham," he soliloquized. "He's a sort of a moral mugwump. He's a kind of a 'sure-thing' game man. After all," he said to himself, with a snort, "Morton was a d——d fool on women; but he was a king above this chap."

Leaving Claire and Burnham to their nightly lukewarm

tête-a-tête, the stern old banker sped away to London. "I'll see this charmer again," he mused.

In the smoking room—on the deck of the tossing leviathan—Seth formed to himself a highly moral address which he would deliver to Marie Martin on his *sub rosa* arrival in Paris. She was warned by cable of his arrival. Yet he was entirely of another mind when he faced the superb, self-possessed woman who welcomed him when his card was sent up, in the Hôtel Meurice.

John Martin, gravely courteous, received the visitor warmly, and left them alone, for the conversation which, he was told, distantly touched his wife's estate.

Seth Wise, an aged Samson, was soon pliant as wax in the hands of this modern Delilah.

"My dear sir," she said quietly, "we must be brief, or I shall have to excuse myself." Seth's prepared speech was forgotten. In five minutes, they were talking like old friends. Marie quietly showed him the full list of the bonds. It remained in her blue-veined hand, sparkling with flashing rings. "Now, my dear sir," she said, with insinuating softness, "you see here the figures that will return to you two hundred and twelve thousand dollars of your property. I wish to have one-third of that recovery for my reward."

"What for?" Wise slowly said. "You have all you want."

"True," smilingly replied the Witch, "but I want it. You don't know how much good I can do with it." Her voice was cynical. "I wish my husband not to think I came empty-handed."

"How shall we arrange this?" Seth muttered.

"You can give me your note, payable six months from date, and I will give you these lists and all I know. I leave the payment to your honor," she quietly said.

"I'll do it," Wise quickly said. "Give me the lists."

In half an hour Seth Wise walked out bewildered from the spider's parlor in the old French hostelry. He dared not ask himself if he was victorious, but he cheered himself with the futile remark that he had done the very best he could.

"By God!" he shouted, as the Channel boat tossed him around like a cork, "I'll make Riley and Oliviera pay for all this misery." For the old banker resented the physical anguish he now suffered every minute. "She's a wonderful woman," he reflected. "I never saw a woman who would not weaken, before. What does she really want that money for?" Seth was mysterious on his arrival in New York. In his inner office, police, shipping men, detectives, foreigners, and strangers of weird appearance, disturbed the aristocratic calm of the clerks, who, with paste diamonds and celluloid cuffs and collars, conferred an air of "Brummagem elegance" on the gloomy temple of finance.

Burnham had few questions to offer, and nothing to tell. His lethargic and easy-going nature was satisfied with the now nightly visits to Claire Morton.

Burnham dared not unfold his inner soul to the old banker. When the old quarrel with Harry Morton brought him to the door of the bank without capital—cast loose on the sea of New York life—he bitterly felt the dependence of being forced to cater to Seth Wise—of hanging on his favors. His vanity was cut by the public knowledge of his financial weakness. In his lonely hours, gloomily reviewing the past, lying at ease in his rooms, he swore to himself: "I'll be independent yet, and then these people will know whom they deal with!"

Yet how? For fortunes are not picked up on the paving-stones every day in New York. The brightest schemes miscarry. Burnham realized, with bitter, silent curses, that a man without money is simply a surplus fool, a poor pawn, a mute slave of others, in New York!

"I must—I *will* have money. I will have it in my own hands. No leading strings, by heaven!"

This craving for wealth made his heart leap up in joy when he knew that Morton was laid away by the blue Pacific. Burnham slyly dissembled. Even to his own semblance in the mirror he dared not confess that the darling hope of his life was now to make the goodly balance of Harry Morton's fortune—Claire's inheritance and the fair young widow herself—all his own in due time.

"Damn Morton's impudence! He tried to turn me out of the bank. Ah!"—Burnham rubbed his hands—"it is the easiest way I know to a business, a fortune, and a pretty wife. I'll administer on his entire estate. By heaven! I'll rule old Wise through Claire. I'll grab the helm of that business, and then I'll destroy every vestige of his memory. I'll not let a soul get near Claire. Trust the old days for that!" And Burnham, complacently humming an antique college love-song, hied away to artfully console Claire. He dared not own to himself that the burning curses he heaped on Harry Morton's name were made gall and venom by the knowledge that the dead man had stolen from him the fair Witch of Harlem as well as his first love. "He got his reward—the poor fool!" Burnham cried.

"I must watch old Seth. He's a wary fish," Ralph mused. Therefore, with gradually increasing tenderness, and wistful waiting, a never-failing round of daily attentions proved to Claire Morton that Burnham was sleepless in her service. Vanity flourishes even under a fair widow's weeds. Burnham's tender assiduity recalled to the woman, whose galled pride still smarted under Morton's mad folly, the graceful Harvard lad who wooed her long ago in the old days, when the world was one love-tinted rainbow.

As Seth Wise left the shores of America, Burnham's

heart would have leapt for joy could he have seen the graceful Claire bending over the flowers he sent daily, and murmuring: "Always the same—the Ralph of old days!"

And yet Burnham let the days go by in silence. He feared to frighten the shy dove he lured to his keeping. "I'll let her come half-way to meet me," he cynically murmured. "Widows *always* do."

But time pressed. The firm was soon to be reorganized, and on the eve of Seth Wise's return, Burnham, with clouded brow, said to Claire: "I must speak with you, now, on a matter of great importance. Seth Wise will arrive to-morrow."

Claire raised her gentle eyes to his. Her heart beat fast. It was coming at last!

Taking her two hands in his, Burnham said softly: "Claire, I will not speak of the past. You know what I have always been to you." He paused—her head was bowed. Ralph took courage to proceed. "On Seth's return, the firm will be formally reorganized. I know not if I shall be asked to stay by him. I care not. My life has been made a sad one for years." His eyes were searching her averted face. The graceful woman in black was now sobbing.

Burnham continued, in soft monotone: "If I leave New York now, I leave it forever."

"And why must you go, Ralph?" Claire queried, turning shining eyes to his eager gaze.

"It rests with you alone," he said simply. "I will not lead a life of hopeless misery. I will not go on to final ruin. To remain here, at the beck and call of Seth—to see you—you—another's wife. Never!" He sprang up and paced the floor. "I am powerless. If I knew your heart, I would take courage and renew the battle of life here. To sign myself a slave of the lamp, and live to see you happy with another, would be mad-

ness. I can make no bargains with Seth. I will not yield to him blindly!

"Claire," he whispered, "I dare not tell this harsh old man my heart. I dare not cross him. I cannot fight him. But the world is wide. You, alone, hold me back. I must be ready to meet him. I will not flinch. Only your own dear lips can decide my fate. *Shall I go or stay?*"

The silent room was tenanted by two beings whose hearts were wildly throbbing. Burnham eyed the graceful form before him, draped in fleecy black. It was an agony of suspense. Was the harvest ready?

He rose, and mutely moved toward the door. But he sprang to her side and caught her to his breast, as she stretched her arms to him, crying: "Don't leave me, Ralph. Stay, for my sake."

In another hour, Claire Morton knew why the seal of silence must be kept upon their coming union till Seth Wise had spoken. Prudence demanded silence until the man of millions had decided the financial future of the reunited lovers.

"Our interests are the same now, darling," Burnham murmured, as he rose to go. "Trust me, my own Claire."

With her head on his breast, she murmured, "I do."

As Burnham led her to a divan, and kissed her fair hands and lips, he said: "Remember, not a word or sign till I tell you we are safe."

The agitated woman murmured: "I am yours in everything." One part of Morton's inheritance was now secured!

Burnham turned to go, and as he did, the cold pallid features of Harry Morton in death seemed to glare from his portrait over the fireplace, and the silent lips to mutter, "Forbear!"

It was only on the avenue, in lighting his cigar after

a brisk walk, that Ralph Burnham's shaken nerves were quieted. "She met me half-way," he chuckled. "I'll burn that fellow's picture up in a few months. Now for old Seth!"

Claire Morton tossed on an uneasy couch. An unavoidable destiny had given her hand away in second marriage. It was the only indicated path.

Burnham would not have felt his spirits rise as high, in this flood-tide of good fortune, could he have seen sturdy old Seth Wise, tramping the deck of his steamer off Fire Island, and growling: "I suppose he's got to have the woman finally, but I'll tie the property up so he can never control it. That will keep him on the safe track."

Two weeks after Seth Wise's return from Paris, he said, one evening: "Maxwell, I want you with me for a day or so. I have some outside business."

Maxwell had already taken on the wistful, nervous, self-contained face of the Wall Street financier. He had drunk of the fatal waters, and the philter was in every pore of his system.

"To-morrow—here—at nine in the evening," the old man ordered. "Be quiet—say nothing. Have a good weapon with you, and a still tongue."

At ten o'clock next evening, Seth Wise—the perfection of elderly conservatism—quietly walked into José Oliviera's sanctum on South Street. Seating himself, with that confident air which will not be denied, Wise awaited the return of his card. Maxwell, armed and with his cue ready, was at Seth's side. In a few moments, the peaked beard, ferret eyes, and velvet voice of José Oliviera were manifested to the visitors.

"Pray enter," Oliviera said, with florid Castilian ceremony, as he was on his guard. He well divined the object of Wise's visit. Both Riley and he had so far

hoarded the bonds received from Overton—in cautious fear—lest a single number should be recognized. It would be fatal. Riley had urged sending them West, or to Europe. The sly Spaniard dissented.

"I take a da bond and put in a da bank. I get the great loan. By an' by, we sell him."

So Riley was fain to possess his unsold bonds in quiet. He never risked himself. "I've too much to lose. A man in me position!" he proudly ruminated. "An' I'll watch old José. He's the divil's own for combinin' and manipulatin'."

Wise, with a glance of his eager eye, took in the nautical ornaments of José's office. "Sly old devil," he murmured. "Not to be caught napping. I must try the bluff game."

He gravely accepted the liquid refreshments gravely offered by the hospitable Spaniard, and even lit one of the Excepcionales.

"What can I a do for you, Señor?" said the wily José, in his silkiest voice. He well knew the potency of Seth Wise in the financial market.

"I called to see you, Señor," Wise calmly said, "with regard to a deposit made with you by my esteemed friend, Mr. Thomas Overton, before his untimely death." Wise waved his hand in solemn salute to the manes of the departed Overton.

"What was this a deposit, Señor?" José warily answered, fencing for time, and sizing up his man.

"It was a certain amount of United States bonds and a large amount of currency," Wise remarked, with a warning glance to Maxwell.

José Oliviera's dark eyes burned in yellow flame. "I know nothing of the a matter you speak of, sir," losing his temper. "You can a talk a to my lawyer. I see you to-morrow." He rose with hauteur.

"All right!" said Wise, rising. "Don José, I only wish

you to remember that I have seen the Inspector in regard to this little matter. He has a list of all the bonds missing, and a general description of the currency. Now, it would be awkward if any of these numbered bonds would be sold or negotiated by well-known men like you—or I," Wise considerately said. "I have a duplicate list. I can leave you a copy. All the banks and the Clearing House have it now. If I find any man selling one of those bonds, or putting them up as collateral——"

José started in nervous dread. "Well, well a," he wolfishly said.

"He'll get twenty years in Sing Sing," curtly said Seth Wise. "By the way," Wise remarked harshly, as he rose to leave, "you had better have your friend Riley of that South Front hotel here to-morrow."

"What a for?" José hissed.

"Because he has got some of them, and you, Señor, have got the rest," Wise calmly replied.

The Spaniard sprang at him like a tiger.

"Drop that knife," yelled Maxwell, as he quickly shoved the muzzle of a pistol into Don José's swarthy face.

Don José fell into a chair.

"Look here, you d——d thieving Spanish scoundrel," yelled Wise, returning, "I know about all your boats—and your smuggling—your devilish plots. You can sleep over this. I'll drive you out of this town. You have got American registers for five vessels sailing from here. I'll have them all caught up by the revenue cutters. I'll ruin you, you dirty Spanish dog," he cried. "I'll tell you something to-morrow that will make you jump, you jail-bird," said Seth, as, with the Anglo-Saxon scorn of a knife, he stumped down the stair.

Maxwell, closing the door, saw Don José drop in his seat, wild with rage.

"Don't mention a word of this to Burnham," Wise

blurted out, as they rolled along up-town. "We will get these two devils frightened. Boy, you came in just right," he gratefully said, as he thought of José Oliviera's knife.

"Never mind, we will get them cornered yet," Maxwell answered.

In Riley's hostelry, the two conspirators talked till the stars went low into the western sea. For José Oliviera—his yellow cheeks burning in a jaundiced rage—hastened to the wily old Boniface of South Front.

"José, my old *amigo*," said the Irishman, when he had weighed the Spaniard's recital, "I don't believe you have yer usual nerve now. An' you made an awful mistake to go an' lose yer temper. I know well this ould veteran money shark Wise. There's a somethin' lackin' in his game."

"Why you say so?" José answered—nervously biting his cigar.

"Because, me old frind," Riley replied, "if he was not afraid to miss the game, we'd 'a' had the police down on us ere this. Did you look over the lists of the bonds?"

"I did not see him. He say he have him," the Spaniard answered.

Riley pulled at his glass of whiskey punch. "He's a queer old chap, this Wise, an' a foxy one. It may be he don't want a big stir about this. He may not care to give up a big reward—and pay the police (bad luck to them!) a good share. Ye can see he don't care to punish us. The ould wretch only wants the good stuff back. Now, I believe he thinks we've got it—you an' I; but he's not got the sure proof yet. I wouldn't be so much afeared to face him. I'll be with you to-morrow. We may put him off—or bluff him down. We'll have the lawyer. An' what time do you meet him, here?"

"I see a him eleven o'clock," José sadly said. "You

see, if we a fight him, we break up da shipping business ver' bad. Two or tree years all lost! We must make a new plans. An' all dese devils down below"—(he vaguely indicated the Spanish main)—"now make plenty of trouble for us."

Riley, with bowed head, admitted this mournful truth. He saw, at a glimpse, how much more José Oliviera—shipping merchant and man of mark—had to lose than a mere water-front publican.

"It's little character I have to risk, anyway," he grimly reflected. "José is in this much deeper. But we'll fight them off. We'll fight them devilish hard."

"Be sure and have the lawyer with you at ten. We'll both be fresher then, José," said the bothered Riley, as they cautiously separated. "An' ye'll be holdin' on to your temper, when we get at this business. It's no use to make a racket here," Riley sighed, as he said good-night.

"Maxwell," said Wise, pondering as they rolled along up-town, "we have these people a little frightened. We may find them, though, very ugly customers. I feel certain that to-morrow will develop their whole game. I need your advice, my boy. They probably have some depraved and tricky lawyer aiding them in covering their tracks. Now, if we are forced to absolute fighting, we can, perhaps, not pin these fellows down. If I go after them criminally, they may get desperate, and conceal this plunder for years. It would be a serious thing to put the screws on, and have them then slip through our fingers, after all. Think the whole situation over. We must break their lines." The old man was tired and haggard.

"Uncle Seth, take a rest. I'll burn the lamp of reason on this. I think I see a shadow of a clew," the younger man cheerily said, as the wearied capitalist grumbled into his house.

Maxwell turned over in his mind the whole strange

story when alone. "These two devils," he mused, "will be ready for an ultimatum to-morrow. They may not see all the weak points of our lines. We may find them a little shaky."

Alas! for Walter Maxwell's hopes. Early morning saw José Oliviera at the breakfast table of his chosen counsellor. Many a dark secret of the Spaniard's tangled schemes was shared by cool, wily John O'Hara.

O'Hara—the needed advocate and guide of many desperate operators—was a waxen-faced, gray-eyed, middle-aged Irish lawyer, whose acuteness was at the service of the scheming clients working, under the very eyes of justice, safely in New York.

"Ah! in trouble again, Don José?" he suavely remarked. "Just wait till I finish my coffee."

O'Hara scented a fat fee. His "professional ear" was soon at the service of the frightened Spaniard. A retired nook in O'Hara's modest home—where "walls without ears" were available—served for José's semi-confession.

"Do you get down now to your office. Have Riley there. I'll think this over. I'll be after you in half an hour. Thank you, Don José," smiled O'Hara, as he carelessly pocketed a handsome check. "I'll give them a chance to make out several more yet," chuckled O'Hara, as he watched the departing man. "Desperate devils they are!"

While Wise and Maxwell were nearing the meeting-place, the cool, unshaken advocate digested Riley's story and his views, for the garrison was now in arms.

Riley was perturbed and voluble beyond his wont. José Oliviera—with an anxious eye cast mentally over the wide-spread network of his illicit trade—realized that personal ruin would befall him, if driven from the friendly shelter of New York. The Stars and Stripes protected his concealed scoundrelism.

The Irish landlord's indignation was intense—the very thought of giving up the easily won hoard was a sacrilege against his "business code."

"Let me do all the talking for you," the lawyer said. "Keep your tempers, gentlemen. Don't answer any questions, unless I direct you. Take your time with these men. Of course, if they bring a lawyer with them, he and I must fight it out."

With grave composure, Seth Wise and Maxwell seated themselves in Don José's den. The moderate manner of O'Hara was only belied by his cool, steady, unyielding gray eye.

"Mr. Wise," said O'Hara, "I represent these gentlemen in my professional capacity."

Seth bowed.

"I understand you claim that they, or either of them, are the holders of some valuable property which you claim as your own."

"I do," Seth replied.

"I have heard my clients' reports. I would now like you to state your case, as far as you wish," O'Hara blandly continued.

In five minutes, Seth Wise, his eye keenly fixed on the two conspirators, finished his repeated demands for the bonds and currency. Maxwell's warning eyes followed his every remark. O'Hara was cheerfully attentive until the old banker ceased. Oliviera and Riley were studying their cigars in silence, and watching Maxwell askance.

With courteous inquiry, O'Hara gazed at Maxwell. "I have nothing to say at present," the younger man said.

O'Hara mused a few moments, as if digesting Seth's story. He fixed his clear gaze frankly on the visitors, as if to read some new features of a—to him—astounding tale.

"I fear, Mr. Wise," he said in a professional but easy

monotone, "that you are the victim of some very grave error, or a strange delusion. Mr. Oliviera is a man of whose standing you must know, in your high financial station. Unless you have absolute proofs of the deposit you claim to have been made—unless you can show me a clear tracing of the property said to be missing to my clients, I shall content myself with merely saying that no such property is or has been in our possession. You will have to look elsewhere," the lawyer said, with a slight emphasis. "You have your own attorneys—you have criminal recourse, or a civil remedy, if you have the slightest proofs." O'Hara paused, with almost a sneer in his cold voice. "I regret the trouble of last night, but you must be aware of your responsibility in making such charges. I do not venture to advise, but to suggest, that we are responsible parties, and we may force you to show us your alleged lists and so-called proofs. In other words, sir, my clients distinctly decline to go further in this business, save under my professional guidance. You must bring us into court, where you are responsible."

Wise firmly gazed at José and the joyous Riley, and then slowly rose. Maxwell was already on his feet.

"Will you give me the name of your lawyer?" said O'Hara, as he fumbled at his watch. "My time is very precious." There was an ill-disguised air of triumph on the smooth scoundrel's face.

"You'll hear from me in due time, sir," Wise stiffly remarked, as he strode to the door.

"I would ask you, then, sir," said O'Hara, handing him his professional card, "to see me alone, on this matter, for the present."

With a mighty effort, Wise—baffled but always self-contained—descended the stair in peace. Maxwell, his eyes burning with rage at the lawyer's cool insolence, strode along in silence.

"Let us go over now to the Astor House and get a private room. We can talk this over, there," said Seth. He was raging.

When securely shut off from the world, Wise gave vent to some vigorous and not choicely selected denunciations of the two conspirators and their smug adviser.

"Uncle Seth, listen to me," said Maxwell. "These people are taking just the course we naturally might have looked for. I have turned the whole tangle over all last night. They are afraid you will push matters as far as you can. You can give no legal guarantee to them of future quiet. They don't care to trust you, or any one. There is but one help, one safety for us, one only means to victory."

"You mean?" Seth began.

"I mean that the wicked woman who bereft Claire Morton of her fortune must save it for her now—if it is saved."

"Marie Ashton!" Seth cried.

"Precisely," Maxwell affirmed.

"And how?" queried the old man.

"She is the only witness who can trace the stolen bonds and cash actually into the hands of those two desperate thieves."

"We must get her evidence," Seth quickly said. "But how?" he murmured.

"It would be ruin to her new life to publish the whole facts, and she would never consent to that," Maxwell sadly said.

"Then we are powerless," mournfully cried the old man.

"By no means," Maxwell retorted. "She has now rich John Martin's peace of mind to guard—her own dark past to hide—her own uncertain future to insure. She must come here. She must be gently induced to come. Then, we can shatter the bulwarks that this lawyer O'Hara will build up."

"How can we induce her? I am all at sea," Seth rejoined.

"I am positive that Overton was smart enough to have her see this division. She must really have been quietly smuggled on the boat the day before the robbery. They would not risk a division of forces on the eve of the attempt. The lists of the stolen bonds were made out on the schooner after division of the plunder. She has held the original bonds. They are the greatest part of the steal. We must now have these two men quietly watched. Let us leave them alone a little. Every day increases their fancied security. Both of these scoundrels have too much local wealth to abandon at a mere threat. If you can write a letter which will touch Marie Ashton's heart, then we are the victors. Strange woman as she is, she will try to protect her old husband, at any trouble to herself—even at the greatest personal risk, if it does not touch him. She can prove the crime of betraying and abandoning Abel Cram. He, poor lunatic, will never be able to speak for himself."

"Maxwell, you are right," Seth slowly said. "Both Overton and Morton lost their lives through Marie Ashton's fatal beauty. Will she aid us now? How can we properly guard her—if she comes?"

Maxwell, with a great triumph in his eyes, said: "She is absolutely innocent of the actual robbery. Now, if John Martin were to hear, in a regular communication, that some property interests of her own needed her attention here, he would send her over at once. He is an old man—he won't fancy useless travel—she will understand. Her presence for a week here would close up all. The Inspector could answer for her peace and safety. José and Riley know nothing of her real past life. You have never lied to her," said Maxwell, with a sigh. "Cable her to-day to the secret address. Write her personally, in full, to the same. Give her your word of

honor, and forward the bank letter about the supposed business in the regular mail. She is smart enough to come alone. Even if he should come over, you can pretend to close up some fanciful matters to her benefit. We must not leave the city for an instant. The thieves will watch us all now."

"I'll try it. I owe it to the memory of poor bedevilled Morton to try and get back the fatal money which was to be his wife's fortune. But we can't punish these devils as we should," Seth fiercely said.

"Not unless we rake up Marie Ashton's smirched past, and all her wild adventures," Maxwell rejoined.

The steamer next day bore away the letters, over which Seth Wise toiled till the midnight bells clanged solemnly. The return cable, in acknowledgment of his careful despatch, cheered him.

For ten days, Wise and Maxwell fretted and fumed in their daily life, the old man's only delight being to con over the daily reports from his detectives. The birds had not flown. A shade of growing care was reported as hovering over the two self-protected thieves.

For it was indeed true that Lawyer O'Hara, with grave face, counselled watchfulness to the partners in crime.

"That old man Wise is no fool. You'll hear from him again. You will need me yet, Don José," the lawyer grimly said. "And I can't make out his little game."

There was joy in the heart of the rugged old banker, when a cablegram told him that the fair Witch of Harlem was on her way to the metropolitan theatre of her dazzling social triumphs. The little fateful cablegram was a talisman to anxious Walter Maxwell. Its brief words were:

Coming—alone—La Bretagne.

Wise vowed in his heart of hearts to shield and pro-

tect the beautiful and erring woman who trusted in the honor of one old man to save the peace and guard the good name of another.

"She cannot be altogether bad—not wholly vile," thought Seth of the woman the waves were bearing swiftly to him.

From an obscure childhood, to womanhood's royal prime—the very sport of destiny, the hunted quarry of man—lonely Marie Ashton had fought her way, single-handed, up to the command of the luxuries dear to Eve's modern daughters.

Sinned against, and deeply sinning, her soiled record was no darker than the life-histories of many of her more fortunate sisters, who live foul lives while sheltered behind the tinselled bulwarks of a sham respectability.

While the good ship La Bretagne swept on through storm and sunshine, bringing Marie Martin to undo the work of Marie Ashton, Seth Wise, watching day and night over the two defiant thieves, communed often with his legal adviser.

The gray-headed lawyer—perched in his lofty eyrie under the shadows of Trinity steeple—listened unmoved to Seth's recital.

Judge Lawton, under bushy eyebrows, smiled now and then, his inscrutable face breaking into a momentary recognition of the usual recurring "Wall Street mystery." The same wild, wolfish greed—the same tangle of lust, play, passion, fraud, wine, women, cards, speculation, and damnable intrigue!

The seething flood of life bears along ever, in New York, these floating human wrecks, and all around ghastly reminders of great social disasters peer above its turbid stream. The great city's maelstrom draws into its deadly whirl rash youth, callow girlhood, reckless manhood, sly age, and even the gilded "butterflies of fashion."

Untold horrors are whispered on the breezes sweeping

over reef and shallow, where luring witches, pirate life-wreckers, and sleek, unpunished scoundrels prey continually on the helpless victims swept along in speculation's tide.

Police officials, lawyers, priests, smug doctors, all these professional attendants on the great human play—behind the scenes—oil the easy-working machinery of this shifting stage. They dragoon the motley crowd of players into quiet, and sneer at the idle spectators winking ignorantly at the blinding glories of metropolitan life.

Lawton quietly imparted his formulated wisdom to his client. "My dear friend, the 'unseen and unheard' is the darkest part of New York life. I have learned to doubt no tale of crime, fraud, or misery. I have come to be surprised at nothing. In the silent shadows which fall over the millionnaire's palace, as well as the tramp's den, in the blackness of the night wrapping in slumber money prince and starving beggar, the real mystery of New York life lurks. Its awful secrets are guarded only by fear or self-interest. Here, in your own case, we must quietly face these people, and crush them yet with invincible proof. When your mysterious woman ally arrives, see me at once. I will then see the Inspector. You must not leave here. Your visitor must not be unguarded a single moment. I can handle these rogues if your witness stands firm. I must know her whole story, in its full detail, the first moment she arrives. By night or day, let me know at once. I will have discreet detectives on duty to watch over your visitor. She must then leave for Europe the moment we are finished. A quiet guardian must go with her, until the moment of her actual return to her Parisian home."

Three days later, as the Bretagne swept up to the Quarantine Station, a grave-faced, elderly man mounted the ship's ladder with the doctor. Seth Wise had his invisible

network already spread around his enemies. Maxwell, on the watch at the dock, waited, with discreet messengers, ready to communicate with lawyer, police, or to attack the enemy.

Crowded with passengers, the saloon decks were filled by a happy returning throng—here and there accentuated by wide-eyed idle tourists.

Even in this motley maze, the dazzling beauty and matchless charms of the lovely *intrigante* distinguished the fair Witch of Harlem.

Seth approached gravely. She smiled, and her steadfast eyes told him all was well. Up the lovely bay the great boat swept, to safely land Marie Martin again on her native shore.

In the hours before the last battle, Seth Wise's mansion was the cage of this beautiful bird of passage. Judge Lawton, Wise, and the lady were seated for hours at a table, covered with all the papers in the case. A discreet detective guarded the house, under Lawton's stringent orders.

Calmly answering every query, with perfect frankness Marie Martin gave the minutest details of the eventful Thanksgiving Eve to the stern old lawyer.

Lawton broke off finally: "Madam," said he, his eyes twinkling in undisguised admiration, "I thank you. We shall soon release you for your return voyage. I hope it will be at once. To-morrow, at ten o'clock, I shall ask Mr. Wise to bring you down to my law office. You may as well have every paper and document ready. Pray rest yourself now, and be assured we will return you speedily to your home. Now, Mr. Wise, let us go! I want you with me."

"Where to?" queried Seth.

The old advocate stood, hat in hand. "To Mulberry Street. I want to swear out some warrants," said Lawton, rubbing his hands. It was a nice case.

Seth's face brightened. As they departed, Judge Lawton turned back. With courtly politeness, the old lawyer said: "Pardon me, madam. When you come down to-morrow, pray come heavily veiled. I do not wish you —if you can so far deny yourself—to leave this house, or show your face at the windows, until this affair is over. After that—you are safe."

Marie smiled. "Is it so necessary?" she archly said.

"Certainly. I would remember your face for a lifetime, madam; others, and younger men, are no more dull than I," said the man of law, with a low bow.

CHAPTER XV.

A MORNING SURPRISE. JUDGE LAWTON'S ULTIMATUM. THE VEILED WITNESS. CLAIRE MORTON'S FORTUNE. THE WITCH UNDOES HER WORK. WEDDING BELLS. AT THE LEGATION BALL. HOME AGAIN!

JUDGE LAWTON'S home library was a pleasant resting-place from his labors in the down-town den. Stretched on a Spanish-leather sofa, the veteran lawyer mused over a cigar on his return from Mulberry Street, after punctiliously disposing of a careful dinner—a daily social rite. Ranged around him, his serried shelves of books were the stores of his intellectual armory. Judicious curtaining shut off the disturbing noises of his family household. Near him, this night, sat his coolest, trustiest aide—Harry Winthrop—an aspiring young limb of the law. The old judge mused over the campaign of the morning. "You have attended to all my orders, Winthrop?" the senior asked.

"Yes, sir," the aide replied. "The men will be on watch. I'll have the three parties you wish there. The papers and warrants are all ready."

"Very good! And, as to the crazy man from the asylum?"

"He will be on time," was the quiet response.

"Keep them all in separate anterooms. Permit no wandering around," the old man continued.

"I understand, sir," the bright junior replied.

"How did this O'Hara take my message?" Judge Lawton queried.

"Quite easily, sir. He seemed glad to think he had you to deal with," Winthrop answered.

"All right, then. I'll now take a good night's rest. I depend on you for all these things, Harry," the great jurist said, almost affectionately.

The junior disappeared, with a friendly "Good-night!"

"There's war in the governor's eye," he said to himself, as he descended the steps. "He always looks that way before one of his 'close action' battles."

"Glad to deal with me, Mr. O'Hara! Well! we are both pleased," murmured the nodding old judge as he dozed away, in light dreams, haunted by the smiles of the banker's lovely mysterious ally.

Nine o'clock next day found Judge Lawton, freshly shaven, calmly roving over the columns of the "Herald" in his sanctum—while at his great council-table the papers in the case were spread out—in his down-town office. His alert mind was full of the subject of the coming interview. Harry Winthrop, entering, announced: "Mr. O'Hara, and friends."

"Show them in," cheerfully answered Judge Lawton. "Here, take these two envelopes," handing him a large and small one. "When the police officers come, bring in the small one. When Mr. Wise and his friend are here—come in with the other. Have you the other people here?"

"All here, sir," was the answer of the junior.

"How's this man Cram to-day?" questioned Lawton.

"Quiet enough. But he babbles foolishly about 'horses' and 'races,' and he needs a little judicious handling," the young man reported.

"Very good—go ahead!" Judge Lawton took up his daily paper, with an air of indifference. He adored tranquillity.

O'Hara, followed by José Oliviera and Riley, marched in, a grave procession.

The two lynx-like advocates eyed each other. They seated themselves after brief salutation, and presentation to Lawton of the two clients.

"Gentlemen, Mr. O'Hara and I will have a few words in private, if you please," Lawton pleasantly remarked.

Strolling to a window the two lawyers conversed in a low tone for a few minutes. José's glittering eyes were glued on the cautiously fencing attorneys. Riley noted with glee Lawton's almost persuasive manner. He was encouraged by the firm nodding of O'Hara's head, in a seeming stubborn negation.

"Ah! he's the boy to stand them off," proudly thought the Boniface, as the two attorneys briskly returned to the table. With a light tap on the door, Harry Winthrop entered, handing two envelopes to Judge Lawton.

"Ah, very good!" said the unmoved advocate. "Show Mr. Wise in."

The two conspirators started. It was, then, to be another locking of horns. This was the day of battle.

Seth Wise gravely seated himself by the side of his lawyer. He did not even recognize the enemy.

"Gentlemen," began Judge Lawton, "we are here on a very unpleasant business. I presume Mr. O'Hara represents you fully?" he said, with a glance at his two visitors.

José bowed. Riley confidently said: "Yes, sir; he does."

"I have no need to go over the nature of the demand

made by my client, Mr. Wise, on you. This demand may have been made in a form perhaps offensive to you; but I wish to ask you, before further proceeding, if you have not yet discovered any property or deposits left with you by Mr. Thomas Overton. They naturally could have a property interest for us."

The two thieves gazed mutely on their lawyer.

"Not a thing, sir—not a cent's worth," stoutly said the brassy O'Hara.

Lawton turned gently to the mute clients. They nodded.

O'Hara's face flushed. Bluff was his game now. "Judge Lawton," he said, "I have brought these gentlemen here to hear some explanation of the two visits, offensively made to them, by your client Mr. Wise, and his friend, or clerk. There is yet some law in New York. I propose that my clients shall have the benefit of it."

Lawton wheeled quickly. His voice had a steely ring in it. "They ought to have the benefit of it. Before they have the full advantages of our justice, I wish to see if I cannot assist their memories a little."

O'Hara was startled at the change in Lawton's manner. "I will not expose my clients to any trap or cross-questioning here," he angrily said.

"Very good!" cried Lawton, with a quick glance at Seth Wise, and a smart clang of his bell.

"Winthrop," he said sharply, "bring me in those warrants, and ask the Captain to step here for a moment."

"Hold!" cried O'Hara. "One word!" His quick eye had noted the ghastly pallor on José Oliviera's face and the blank amazement of Riley, whose square jaw dropped visibly.

"Well, sir," sharply said Lawton.

O'Hara snapped out: "Explain this to me before you take any further step. I claim the right as an attorney to friendly treatment at your hands."

"You shall have it, sir," pleasantly replied Lawton. "Winthrop, never mind the warrants. Bring in those people."

O'Hara and his two clients were busily whispering as the door opened, and three rough-looking men, followed by a police officer, entered.

Winthrop stood waiting in the door. His eyes were sparkling. José Oliviera and Riley sprang to their feet.

"Not a word!" thundered Lawton. "Silence, everybody!" He made a sign to Winthrop, and soon in the open doorway there also appeared Abel Cram, curiously blinking around, and supported by an attendant on either hand.

"Do you see this man?" sharply queried Lawton of the three first-comers, who glared at each other, and then at the two excited conspirators.

A unanimous mumble acknowledged the fact.

"Get a good look at him. Examine him closely," said Lawton. Silence reigned, broken only by the hoarse whispers of the two villains to their astounded lawyer, both talking at once.

"Take him away for the present," Lawton remarked. Abel was led away, and, at a touch of the arm from Winthrop, the officer retired.

"Now, gentlemen," said Lawton determinedly, "I will ask these three men, in your presence, if my statement is not correct. On Thanksgiving Eve this man, shown you, boarded the schooner Restless, in the stream, from the tug Faugh à Ballagh."

O'Hara started.

Lawton resumed: "His companions were Thomas Overton and these two gentlemen here with Mr. O'Hara. Overton left the port on the schooner, and this man, who came on the tug in good health, was thrust ashore at a wharf on the North River in an almost helpless condition. He was dragged off—abandoned; and you," cried Law-

ton, pointing to the now alarmed scoundrels, "helped to drag and push him off."

O'Hara's face was crimson. The precious pair at his side gazed longingly at the open door and windows.

"Now," said Lawton, in a harsh, menacing tone, "I do not care whether I land only three, or the whole five of you, in State's prison. This man was brutally assaulted and ruined for life. Is that the man who was put off the boat?" the judge demanded of the three terrified longshoremen.

They hung their heads, and answered, "Yes."

"Mr. O'Hara," Lawton briskly said, "these three people were the captain, engineer, and mate of that tug, which is under Mr. Riley's daily control." Riley groaned. "Now, Winthrop, keep these men here till I call for them." Under the clerk's guidance the witnesses slipped from the room.

Turning to the three astounded listeners, Lawton coldly said: "Mr. O'Hara, I could greatly extend my remarks on this transaction. I will only say to you that I can prove the fact of this Abel Cram's complicity in this robbery. I can prove that he took the plunder of the bank robbery on board that tug with Overton. I have now the warrants for your clients' arrest for this assault and later robbery of the thief. I will let you confer with them for five minutes before I call in the officers. Here is a small side room where you are secure."

Lawton opened a corner snuggery, where many a client, fair or otherwise, had escaped sudden interruptions.

As the door closed on the three, Seth Wise was about to speak. Lawton placed his finger on his lip, and calmly walked up and down. His face was twitching with suppressed emotion.

Wise and Lawton started as the closet door was flung open and the three visitors reëntered. There was a furtive smile on O'Hara's lips.

"I am surprised at your attempt to intimidate me, Judge," he measuredly said. "My clients are perfectly willing to meet any trial you may bring them to. If this man Overton brought a drunken fool to the schooner with him and sent him ashore, it is his business, not ours. I suppose you know he is dead," said the wily advocate, his sneer now returning. "I warn you now, sir, that you have no right to restrain my clients here. I demand their regular arrest, and I'll make you smart for it."

Seth Wise looked flurried, while Lawton calmly leaned over and whispered to him. Seth rose, and in a moment returned, leading into the room a veiled lady whose elegance of form was the only visible hint of the beauty hidden by the double folds of the silken gauze.

O'Hara rose in mad anger.

"This is some more of your patched-up tomfoolery. I propose to leave this room at once." His clients, with shaking knees, gazed on the woman, whose basilisk eyes were peering at them from under her silken armor. They could not see her face.

"Oh, you may abandon your clients, if you wish," said Lawton, throwing off the mask.

In a voice of thunder he exclaimed to the two villains, about to sneak out after their lawyer: "Not another step! I've got two other warrants for you, and you will go to the Tombs. Winthrop, just ask the Captain to step in here." Lawton was in his glory.

"For God's sake! O'Hara," cried Riley.

"Don't be a fool. Wait a minute," said the sullen attorney.

In a few seconds the stern face of a police captain appeared at the door.

Judge Lawton sprang to his side. "These are the two men, Captain," pointing to them. "If they attempt to pass, arrest them under the second warrants." The Captain bowed, and the golden shield on his breast

looked very large to the now thoroughly frightened villains.

"Pray, be seated, Captain," politely remarked the old judge. Winthrop and Wise were keenly eying the half-frantic thieves. "I wish you to hear this lady's statement."

In some strange way Walter Maxwell had stolen into the room, and he now fixed his steady gaze on Don José. His hand was on his hip-pocket.

"Do you know these two men, madam?" said the judge, addressing the veiled lady.

"I do," was the brief reply, in an agitated voice.

"Where did you see them last?" the lawyer continued.

"In the cabin of the schooner Restless on the night the bank of Morton, Burnham & Co. was robbed. The schooner was then lying in the Lower Bay."

José and Riley both whispered to O'Hara, whose angry gesture bade them cease. He was watching, and amazed.

"Have you seen this sick man, Abel Cram, before to-day?" Lawton continued.

The lady nodded. "I saw the same man come on board the Restless with these two men and Mr. Overton, the night we sailed," was the answer.

"And you recognize, also, the three men who were handling the tug, who are now outside?" Lawton continued, in triumph.

"I do, certainly. I saw them when I went on the schooner," was her reply.

Every head was now bent forward to catch these fateful words coming from behind that silken veil, whose folds could not be penetrated by the shivering thieves or the anxious watchers. A veiled Sibyl!

"Thank you, madam. That will do for the present. Captain," said the old judge, "I may need you in a

moment. I probably will," he said, with a ringing voice, as the phlegmatic police commander—used to such scenes—walked out to enjoy a cigar.

"Now, Mr. O'Hara," said Lawton, "if you wish to retire alone I am willing you should go. I will proceed to further refresh the memory of your injured clients—should you desire it—however, before you leave us, as to the valuable forgotten deposits left with them by Mr. Thomas Overton."

"Go ahead—you may as well," said O'Hara doggedly. His bitterly muttered curse was withheld, for he suddenly thought of stiffening his fee to gigantic proportions. It would pay him to know all. He had Riley and Oliviera in the jail-door. O'Hara never let go his grip. He played no losing cards.

"Madam," softly said Lawton, resuming, "did you see Mr. Thomas Overton give these two men any valuables on the night of your sailing?"

"I did," was the calm answer.

"It's a d——d lie!" howled Riley. "We were all alone." A curse broke from Oliviera's curled lips. Maxwell and Winthrop sprang before the mysterious oracle. Lawton merely smiled.

"One more interruption like that, you loafer," said Lawton, "and I'll complete the arrest. You were born for Sing Sing."

The sound of suppressed breathing was heard from the cornered scoundrels. The Spaniard was yellowish green.

"What was it?" Lawton sharply asked, to end matters.

"It was a very large amount of United States bonds and currency, which was divided among the three, in certain proportions. I have the figures," the veiled Witch firmly answered.

"Have you with you a list of the bonds then divided, and their numbers?" Lawton asked, warming up.

"I have it here, now," said the mysterious lady, stretching out a beautifully gloved hand, and disclosing the symmetry of a lovely arm.

The eyes of Riley and Don José were haggard and wolfish. Seth Wise and the two young armed guardians were on the alert. O'Hara was sullen but observant. The game was up. He was only now calculating his fee.

"You saw the list made by Thomas Overton, in the presence of these men, that night?"

"I did." The reply was decisive and firm.

"And Overton gave it to you that night?" Lawton remorselessly added.

"Yes, sir. I have had it ever since," the Sibyl said.

"Where were you? How could you see?" Lawton quietly asked, gazing triumphantly at the panting thieves.

"I was looking through the little window slide between my private cabin and the main cabin," the lady said wearily. "Overton told me to do so, the moment he came on board."

"Only one question more! Where was this poor fellow Cram at this time?"

Lawton had driven his nail home.

"He was lying sleeping on a cushioned bench, in the same cabin with them. They filled him with drink," proceeded the veiled witness.

"And you then sailed away with Overton, and these two men took Cram off on the tug?" Lawton concluded.

"Precisely," now faintly said the tired woman. She was failing under these avowals.

"Mr. Winthrop, pray take madam out," said the sharp-witted Lawton.

The veiled accuser rose, and gracefully swept into the adjoining rooms. The room seemed lonely.

"This is a pretty likely story," sneered O'Hara. "A flimsy yarn—and you don't dare show the lady's face. Well, I am done with these fairy tales."

Lawton smartly said to Maxwell: "Bring in that maid. Oh! I have another witness."

José and Riley bounded from their seats, as Maxwell ushered in the yellow-visaged handmaiden, Fanny. Her wondering eyes rolled around the group in surprise.

"Did you ever see these two men?" said Lawton.

"Laws a massy, yes, sir. I fust seed 'em with Massa Overton on the schooner Restless, the night we done sail from New York."

"And the four men outside," the judge questioned, "where did you see them?"

"I done seed 'em all there. I went on that there schooner with my missis, on their little steamboat; an' the other man, he come on board with Massa Tom Overton." The girl was voluble.

"Very good, Fanny—you can go."

The yellow damsel fled away gladly to her mistress.

"Now, sir," said Lawton, in a ringing voice, striding quickly up to the defeated O'Hara, "I'll give you one last chance to see if your clients' feeble memories have been quickened. You see, I have two witnesses to the felonies." O'Hara winced. "I have here a full list of the stolen bonds, and their numbers; also, the general figures of the currency."

"Can I see them?" meekly said O'Hara, whose frantic clients were now clutching at his sleeves.

"Yes," coldly said Lawton, "after your clients are lodged in the Tombs. I will use these facts in the search warrants when I have their houses, safes, and private vault boxes, properly examined. I shall not wait very long. They can't get away."

O'Hara, his head drooping, led the two defeated scoundrels into the seclusion of the side room. Silence reigned in the outer office until, after ten minutes, O'Hara appeared alone.

"Judge, I would like to speak to you privately," he humbly said.

"See here, O'Hara," Lawton replied, "I want witnesses of this little transaction. I have not a moment to give you. I have had this list of bonds copied, and also the amounts of currency received by each of these thieves. I do not propose to compound any felony. I simply say that on return of the bonds and currency—or an equal amount, forthwith—I will not have these warrants served, at present, for the felony. As for the assault on Abel Cram, your clients can pay such a sum as you and I may agree on to provide for him, in case of future need. You may not be aware that his mind is somewhat restored. His evidence is available. I'll send out an agent of mine and an officer in plain clothes, with each of your clients. You can stay here if you wish. If they return at once with the property, I will not press the theft charges. It remains with them to make provision for Cram, and also Flanagan. My expenses you can pay also."

"How will I get this money back?" muttered O'Hara, whose pride was utterly broken. He hated defeat. It was his Waterloo.

"Add it to your bill, and you pay it to me. You will not talk very much about this transaction. You would not like to be disbarred, would you?"

Lawton paused, gazing in O'Hara's eyes.

The sly advocate groaned. "Just give me a little time to decide," he pleaded.

"Yes, exactly five minutes," said the merciless Lawton, placing his watch on the table. Old Seth Wise's eyes were gleaming.

"There are duplicates of the lists—one for each of your gentlemanly clients. I advise you to be brief. I want to hear from you alone." Lawton drew out a long cigar. The listening circle gazed at each other. O'Hara crept into the anteroom.

The quickly flying seconds brought to the listeners the sound of loud argument, curses, and appeal. It finally died away. The door opened, and, pale as a ghost, the evidently disgusted O'Hara returned.

"It's all over. We accept. But we stipulate that you will not interfere with José Oliviera's business or bother Mr. Riley," the lawyer concluded. He must save something.

"I will leave them to the general hangman, whenever he can catch them on his own account," Lawton rejoined. "It is simply to avoid publicity that we do not go on and unearth your whole devilish schemes. Are your men ready now?" Lawton was remorseless.

"They are," despondently said O'Hara. In ten minutes, two officers, with Maxwell and Winthrop, whirled away with the separated villains in search of their ransom.

Judge Lawton suggested to Seth Wise a drive home with the mysterious lady. He wanted no dogging her footsteps.

"We will be ready for you, Mr. Wise, on your return," said the delighted counsellor, as he warmly pressed the hands of the departing beauty, whose incognito is still preserved, as a mysterious goddess, in the offices of the victorious Lawton.

O'Hara moodily chafed in the little private room during the two hours before Wise returned. The thieves were ready for the settlement. O'Hara had finally forced the cornered scoundrels to see the wisdom of surrender. The even tenor of the legal office routine was pursued until the crestfallen pair of rogues counted up the full amount of their plunder.

Reassuring glances told Lawton that all was well. Bustling Seth Wise, with unwonted activity, checked off the original bonds, smiling broadly. The deft fingers of Maxwell and Winthrop verified the return of the total

amounts of cash and bonds. There was a grim look on old Seth's face, as he softly murmured: "And this is the fatal treasure for which Overton and Morton died. Hard enough to win—harder yet to keep!"

Winthrop dismissed the babbling Abel, still muttering his incoherent gabble of "races," "pools," and "horses," to his place of safety. His punishment was bitter enough without shackles.

Before the whole assembled party, the police captain paroled the three tugmen, with a warning to report their addresses once every month. The Captain joyously departed, with a cheerful calm on his indurated face, for he was aware that his "interests" were safe in the hands of the victorious Lawton. A handsome douceur was inevitably forthcoming.

Not a word on the secret business was spoken, till the police squad had disappeared.

"Mr. O'Hara," said Judge Lawton briskly, "I wish now to warn your clients, before you, that their future safety will depend upon the absolute freedom from any interference, of every single person connected with this forced settlement. You can see me to-morrow, and adjust the matters of expenses spoken of to you. I have not chosen to show you how deeply we have probed your clients' combined rascalities. If this scandal ever reaches the public, it will be their own fault. I don't fear you in the matter. I will have them watched until the future shows them to be harmless. That will do." Lawton took up a brief.

Black boiling blood inflamed the visages of the two helpless scoundrels as they crept down-stairs—followed by their defeated adviser.

"Thank God! I can make these fools pay me well for this humiliation," O'Hara thought, as he called a coupé, after bidding them rendezvous at his house.

"Now for a pleasant luncheon," cheerfully cried Judge

Lawton. As the party descended, Maxwell and Winthrop were proudly bearing the bulky bundles of the recovered securities and treasure.

It was only when Seth Wise saw the vault doors close on the regained fortune of Claire Morton that the old man breathed freely. He contemplated with pride the new electric detectors, and added safeguards of the strengthened vaults. Every device of human ingenuity had been added to the stronghold.

"Not a word now, to Burnham, of the details of this recovery," Seth gravely adjured Maxwell. "I do not wish him ever to know of Mrs. Martin's flying visit to this country. Poor Morton! His wife's destined fortune is nearly all recovered. The only shortage left is against his own estate—and the bank's surplus profits."

Judge Lawton and Maxwell, with the gayly triumphant Winthrop, could not divine the cause of the cloud hovering on old Seth's brow, as the party sat in the private club-room. It was Morton's overshadowing memory.

World-worn weariness furrowed Seth Wise's cheeks. Old and lonely, his life spent in battling for money—he was tired of striving for others, and chilled by finding disappointment and care on every hand. For his own heart told him that Morton's money, Morton's business, Morton's fair widow, and his own endowment of Claire —all would drift into Ralph Burnham's hands.

After a life spent in toiling for the three young people he had so long protected, his most cherished plans had miscarried. It was a callous stranger adventuress who had thrown these benefits all into Ralph Burnham's hands. Truly, the Witch had wrought, in the dark, for Ralph, her quondam lover. And Morton's mad passion had swept away in its fiery flood the well-planned work of Seth Wise's whole life.

The old banker fiercely crunched his cigar, and quaffed his beaker of wine. He wearily dreamed of returning

to work. Work, money-grubbing, was his only resource —his panacea—his darling daily burden.

"Judge," said Wise, on leaving, "I leave every detail of the O'Hara settlement to you. I wish you to lend me this young man "—nodding at Winthrop—"to escort our veiled witness back to Paris. He shall lose nothing by the trip."

"With pleasure," said Lawton.

"Then, youngster," Wise remarked, "get ready to take the next French steamer. Come up to my house to-morrow night, and see your dangerous and precious charge. I will give your instructions to you then."

"Maxwell," said the old banker, as the others left, "I am going to rearrange all my affairs. I do not wish Burnham or Claire Morton to know the details of this last affair. It would, perhaps, throw a shadow over their future."

Maxwell understood, and was silent.

"You have won your spurs fairly, my boy. In the reorganized firm, you shall find in your interest a solid reward for your devotion and energy. Now, get away to the bank. I am going up-town to see our Parisian visitor."

Marie Ashton Martin welcomed "her genial foe" at his home with eagerness.

As the old man gazed on her now undisguised beauty, thinking of her wonderful nerve and ready wit, he marvelled not that her witchery carried her safely through life's dangers and intrigues.

"I know, madam, you naturally wish for an immediate departure," said he. "Pardon, if I speak of business. I will give you to-morrow the drafts for the well-earned money which will explain your brief visit. I can insure you absolute silence here. Your safety is provided for by the escort I will give you to your own door. But one thing occurs to me. Where are the original bonds you received and for which you settled?"

"I brought them with me, thinking you might need them," the quick-witted Witch answered.

"I will replace them with even amounts of the same value, so you will never be annoyed. Now write your cablegram to Mr. Martin, and I will also write one. Your return will be expected, and your success announced."

It was soon done, and, after explaining every detail of the day's work, Seth said: "I will leave you now. Do not show your face out of this shelter in the day. I will drive out with you in the evening—and arrange for all your wants. Keep your maid indoors also. Is there any one of the thieving gang who might know you?"

"Ah! no," the Witch replied, "the Spaniard and Riley never saw my face. There was but one man who could have betrayed me to them." She spoke sadly.

"And he was?" Wise interjected.

"Captain Jonas Skinner, of the Restless. Read that."

The Witch handed Wise a brief notice in the New York "Herald."

Lost—in a cyclone off Cuba—the American schooner Restless, and her entire crew.

It was indeed true. Wise read the details of the foundering of the fleet racer, under the command of Captain Skinner, in one of the sudden storms of the treacherous Spanish main. But one or two poor wretches were saved to tell the tale.

"Then you are safe here," he said, with a sigh.

"Now, I wish to leave the first moment I can," said the imprisoned beauty. "I have kept my word. I look to your honor to cover my history here, and protect my past."

"The steamer sails to-morrow," Seth answered. "I send Winthrop to guard you. He will provide all. And now, will you protect your own *future?*" Seth earnestly said, taking her hands in his.

The Witch of Harlem sprang to her feet. Her eyes blazed.

"There's one man who has taken me at my best—has given me of his best—believed in me—and trusted me. By the God above us! I will never betray him. He shall never know me as I have been. If God spares him the disgrace of that awful history, I will make atonement."

The old banker passed out silently—his eyes filled with tears—but a blessing shone on her through the mists which veiled her from him. Her slender hands were still tingling with his earnest clasp.

Fleet and graceful, the French liner swung out next day to bear Marie Martin away from her native land forever, in peace of mind. Her share of the recovery was safe in her possession. Old Seth gravely said adieu at his home. Maxwell waved a good-by from the pier, and Harry Winthrop, delighted at his trust of honor, pointed out the last glimpse of the shore to his lovely charge, where the sun sank in purple and gold.

All was over. The baffled conspirators were powerless to make open or covert attack. Judge Lawton cheerfully closed up the final details with the sullen O'Hara.

As the shore faded from her sight, the fair Witch of Harlem turned her face toward the east, where a newer life, safe now from the vengeance of old enemies, awaited her. Her watchful escort handed her a little box, as the lady sought her rooms for the evening. "Mr. Wise asked me to give you this, when we would be off shore."

In her stateroom, Marie opened the case. It contained a diamond bangle of surpassing beauty, and within its golden circlet was engraved the simple word, "Remember."

The fair Witch of Harlem clasped it on her arm, with a happy heart. She did not wonder. She knew the old banker would not trust himself to frame his parting advice in spoken words.

On through the night—lulled by the sighing ocean breeze—dashing along toward the distant haven she sought, Marie Martin's eyes closed dreamily in hope of future peace as the pressure of her diamond circlet brought to her lips the word "Remember."

Three months after the safe return of the veiled witness, Seth Wise, his mind free of cares, called Burnham and Maxwell to him in a solemn conclave. He laid down his views as to the permanent reorganization of the firm. "Burnham, Maxwell & Co." was to be the banner under which the young men would battle. Judge Lawton had already prepared the drafts of the new organization.

"I shall watch you from time to time, and so have something left to amuse me with," said the veteran.

With some embarrassment, when alone, Ralph Burnham confided to Seth Wise his approaching marriage with Claire Morton. He felt in his heart that Marie Ashton's wiles alone had given him his bride.

Seth Wise was very grave. "When will the wedding take place?" he said.

"In three months," Ralph replied; "but I thought it only fair to you to tell you now, as it might make some difference to you in your ideas as to the new firm."

The old man mused for a long interval. Lifting his head, he said calmly: "Ralph, I shall put the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars I intended for Claire Morton in the new business—in her name. I will provide for her when she is Claire Burnham, further, by my will. To you, I will give that share of income of the business which Morton drew as managing partner, without capital. I supposed this marriage would occur," said the old man with a half-sigh, "and I have thought it over. Are you satisfied?" he searchingly asked.

"I am very grateful to you," said Burnham.

"Then I may fully confer with Claire on this coming event," said Wise.

"Most certainly, sir," said Burnham.

"I will go up there now and see her," Wise replied, "as I wish all these changes finished soon. I need rest and peace of mind."

It seemed strange to Burnham that old Seth had uttered no word of rejoicing, and had extended him no congratulation. Old Seth muttered as he left: "I've tied your hands, my boy; you'll never go astray. That money will be your price, and you will have to earn it!"

That night Claire Morton was distraite in the presence of her accepted lover. The serious matters discussed by Seth Wise with the expectant bride occupied their minds, and on the lips of both trembled the words they dared not utter. In vague unrest, each remembered that, while Seth's hand showered royal benefits on both, his lips were silent in benediction or approval. There was a hovering shadow between them. It was the wraith of foolish, passionate Harry Morton—in his lonely grave in far-off Honduras.

Seth Wise, with Maxwell—now his only house companion—cheerily passed his evenings. The new firm was proudly blazoned forth, the papers all signed, and, brave in its new decorations, the bark launched on the seas of finance ploughed gayly along. As the day of Burnham's wedding approached, Seth's face took on a graver tinge. A week previous, Maxwell handed to Ralph Burnham a sealed letter from Wise, and one for his bride. While there was a royal present sent by Uncle Seth to the lady, Maxwell—as best man at the strictly private marriage—marvelled not at the absence of the old banker, who was absent "on business" in a distant city.

The letters contained the old banker's wish that bride and groom would go abroad for a visit. "Mr. Maxwell is authorized to represent me in the bank while you are away, and I will also watch it myself."

As Ralph Burnham read these words, he pondered

deeply. The letter to Claire was never read by him. As husband and wife, they sailed at once for Europe, without discussion of these little shadows.

It was a singular fact that the old banker promptly appeared at his desk on the day after their departure, and delighted himself, in their absence, with a fit of extreme industry. Harry Winthrop's return had closed the great bank robbery affair finally—with the safe return of the veiled witness.

Wandering over Europe, Ralph Burnham and his wife sought in vain to renew the electric sparkle of the old Harvard days. Nature's panorama, the social whirl, and bizarre incidents of travel enlivened these later days. There was an easy peace and harmony between them. Their future interests were identical, and a confidence, born of long usage, bound them in a light yoke. Still in the early bloom of life, the world was open to them both, with all its varied pleasures. And yet—on the deck of the Rhine steamer—walking late, under the stars—in all their rovings—Ralph felt a vague uneasiness. That Claire was finally bound to him for life he admitted, with great self-satisfaction. The future was clear before him. And yet, the dark eyes of his wife had never the tender flash of the loving Claire of olden days. The long years of waiting drifted back in memory. A gnawing jealousy of the dead man whispered that Claire had never really preferred him to the other. He was simply successor in marriage, in place. even in fortune, to the absent one. His successes were wrought for him by the remorseless fate which ruined the friend of his youth. Delilah's witchery left its mystic traces. A canker blighted the laurels he had tardily won, in the mad New York strife for place and wealth.

And Claire Burnham could not altogether drive away from her heart and mind the man whom she still regretted. An angry flush still mantled her brow as she

thought of how that one fair wanderer had supplanted her. Child of the modern egoistic life, Claire tried to believe that Burnham had not sought her for all her hand would bring. And yet, she was always haunted by this disturbing thought. In her dreams, the dead and living loves hovered around her uneasy pillow. Pallid fingers seemed to grasp at the myrtle on her fair brows.

Three months of restless wandering brought them back in ennui to Paris—for the "home voyage." Burnham longed now for the nerve tonic of the "Street's" excitements. Claire's rosy dreams of a new life, lit up with the fervid tenderness of ideal love, had faded. She turned to society's dazzling shadow pictures.

There was a great ball at the Legation of the United States. To this the returning married lovers were bidden. Great was the gathering under the social ægis of the Stars and Stripes in Paris. The American Minister deftly gathered up all those near him who rejoiced in that somewhat elastic title of "prominent Americans." It was a brave sight. Clad in garb of latest splendor, the bright-eyed, hard-hearted, pushing daughters of "Uncle Sam" amazed the local guests by their audacious beauty, their frank eccentricities, and haughty scorn of each other. The "men of mark" assimilated more easily. While the gilded youth of Paris deftly besieged the "budding roses with golden stems"—these too easily captivated Western heiresses—ranks on ranks of callow, idle young American beaux applied themselves to the wine-cup, or laid the foundations of extremely reckless flirtations with our too complaisant matrons *en voyage*.

These wayward ladies, free of hand, plethoric in purse, and stopping at no ordinary obstacles, grimly exhibited trains of young admirers to the envious eyes of the unmarried "buds." But the grand coterie of hawk-eyed schemers—millionnaires, manufacturers, and solid citizens

—amiably banded together. They gazed helplessly at the "foreign assaults" upon the bright-eyed battalion of heiresses. By tacit consent they ignored the decidedly *risqué* abandon of their luxurious wives. It was a sore subject to these devotees of "business."

Sprinkled through the motley crowd at the ball, wandering Russian princes, hungry Italian counts, stiff-necked German barons, haughty Austrian officers, and calm English "swells of the single eyeglass" glared at the fortunate French noblesse, and amused themselves with this great "international heiress battue." Herding in little knots, in card-room, *tabagie*, or near the buffets—in search of the national cocktail—the pillars of American finance furtively chatted of railroad jobs, petroleum swindles, mining robberies, or "prophetic politics." Rotund in form, easy of disposition, and hugely bored, they awaited the close of the "market exhibition" of their fair compatriots and their own wives and daughters.

Burnham and his handsome wife—with the listless air of good New York society—coldly gazed, with superior scorn, upon the Californian grandees, the Chicago contingent, and the efflorescent representatives of the sunny South and the wild West.

Tired and amused beyond measure—it was still a pleasure to Ralph to meet here and there an old comrade, a club friend, or college classmate.

With pride he presented them to his beautiful wife, and felt his marital honors for the first time as a new dignity.

Chatting a few moments with one of these old friends, Ralph graciously consented as he said: "Burnham, I wish to have the pleasure of making you both acquainted with the most beautiful woman in Europe. She's a great friend of mine. They have a princely home here."

Moving through the glittering throng, the Burnhams, piloted by their escort, approached a circle where rib-

bon, star, medal, and gala dress varied the conventional American black.

"Quite a court the lady holds," said Ralph merrily, picking his way through the outskirts of the circle. He saw a queenly woman, in superb robes, with flashing jewels dazzling the eye. His bewildered senses almost failed him when he heard his friend say: "Mrs. Martin, I wish to present to you my friend, Mrs. Burnham, of New York."

It was Delilah of Harlem!

Ralph sprang forward as his wife, raising her eyes, with a wild gasp fell back senseless in his arms.

In a few moments, with the aid of eager volunteers, Ralph bore away his almost frantic bride. The *convenances* were ignored. Eager questioners thronged around. While his wife moaned in his arms, he bitterly cursed the radiant queen of the ball; for, with her splendid golden hair crowning the fairest brows, her magnificent form bewildering in its classic lines, and the jewels of an empress crowning her stately head, Marie, the Witch of Harlem, flashed at him one glance of unutterable scorn and hatred.

So it was to her feet he had led—guided by fate—the bride won almost at the side of his best friend's grave. Beside Marie, in pride, a grave-faced man was guarding this jewel with the evident rights of proprietorship. It was John Martin, unsuspecting and happy.

Ten days later, Burnham and his wife landed at New York. The voyage was one of weariness and haunting sadness. Distrust lurked even under the unwithered marriage roses. In a flash, Claire had caught the poisonous suspicion of some yet unexplained secret. She trusted no one now. Burnham moodily nursed in his bosom the history of the hidden past. Ever, between the two spouses, something drifted to keep them farther apart.

Yet a rare brightness beamed in Claire's eyes, as Seth Wise, hearty and jovial, hailed the wanderers. In three

months all the shadows of the past had faded from the old banker's mind. He now welcomed them home to an unclouded future. He had chased the shadows from his brow.

Seated at table—Maxwell the only other guest—the little circle of the new firm was complete. Wise and Maxwell exchanged furtive glances, for the wanderers of the honeymoon trip were the only serious ones.

As the dinner progressed, Seth Wise, rising, announced the social completion of the new firm. Maxwell was about to marry a bright-eyed and spirited girl who had been content to wait till the brilliant wanderer could find her a home.

While Burnham and Maxwell lingered over their wine, Seth and Claire, in the drawing-room, exchanged confidences.

Claire brokenly related to her uncle the story of the rencontre of the Paris ball.

"My child," solemnly said the old man, "be silent forever on this episode of your life. Good or bad, you owe to that woman's influence your recovered fortune and the husband whose name you bear. The ways of fate are mysterious."

Claire, wondering, was fain to be silent.

Maxwell, listening to Burnham's recital, quietly said: "Ralph, I think if I were you I would put the seal of silence on your own past. It would drive your wife mad to find out the secret of your own insane love for the Witch of Harlem. She has brought you together, after all. Now, make the best of it. Let the dead past rest."

Two months later, Seth Wise returned in the evening from a wedding to his lonely mansion. He had given away a sweet girl bride to the bright-hearted Maxwell, whose brevet of "son" had been fairly earned.

Burnham and wife marvelled not at old Seth's joy in this bridal, for each could silently whisper: "There was

no shadow of the past over these lovers." And the Burnhams were now staidly content, if not happy.

The old banker soliloquized, in his cosey library, after the young neophytes had fled away: "Strange are the pathways of love—strange the ways of fate—stranger still the lottery of marriage."

Looking around on the splendors of his solitary home, the veteran muttered: "Was I really wrong never to marry? Did I miss sweetest joys or only intrigue and heart-break? My life-work is nearly done. I have almost finished my labors. If I could read the future, which of these unions will be crowned with enduring happiness? Who can tell? Maxwell, bright and buoyant, mated to his first love; Burnham and Claire, after years of parting, trying to live over the past; or"—he added with a sigh—"honest John Martin, adoring as a blind slave the storm-tossed Witch of Harlem? Maxwell and his bride are in love's happiest dream. Will it last? Burnham! Did Ralph marry for place, money, or to right the injustice of years? Is it love, or mere self-interest, with him? Claire! Her pride was outraged by the past. Does she think now complacently of Harry Morton's memory? And bewitching Marie Ashton! Was it her own safety, or some deeper scheme for the future which tied her to John Martin? Alas! the only positively secure one is John Martin. He is self-deceived and idolizes the lovely woman whose dark past makes her shudder in his arms. He enjoys the blind happiness of ignorance. These recent marriages—what will their harvest be? I leave it to destiny."

In his hand a letter from the successful Haggerty informed him that "Mrs. John Martin" was an acknowledged Parisian social leader. Her unfailing devotion to her husband was the theme of even the cynical Parisian colony. Was this a beginning of her atonement? A letter from her announced her perfect peace.

Mr. Edward Haggerty described his own happiness and acknowledged the stern directions of Seth Wise to not only seal his own lips, but those of the vivacious Viola, forever on the past life of Marie Ashton. A judicious promise of "future business" was a guarantee of Haggerty's faith. Ed. had an eye to the nimble dollar.

"And these two blackmailers, the Haggertys, seem really happy!" cried the old man, throwing the letter down. "What is happiness?" he sighed.

Rising and gazing from his window on the glittering streets, filled with the passing crowd, lonely old Seth Wise mused upon the fate of those dragged along in this restless human current. "After all, it is the unanswered riddle of modern New York. Here man and woman chase wealth, entrap and deceive each other. Smiling fraud, glib hypocrisy, successful scoundrelism, and dark, crime-tainted intrigue pass easily here in the social mart: everything goes when stamped with the golden seal. There is no real power in these days but wealth. The soiled sister, in her carriage, rides down the honest wife and mother, trudging along on foot. Racing along in eagerness, living under the scream of the locomotive and the rattle of the 'Elevated,' the pulse attuned to the click of the telegraph and the bell of the telephone, New York City life is a burning fever. Night throws out its battalions of male and female banditti: day lets loose the hawk-eyed, anxious schemers who fight to the death under the banner of 'business.' Easy wealth, rolling in luxury, studies refined vice, behind golden screens. Misery throws the needy man and woman at the mercy of the strong. And yet the sum of human happiness is unchanged. Thousands of the worthy calmly quaff the cup of life and leave untouched the bitter dregs, and the poison of social madness. Bounding pulse, bright eye, loving heart, ringing laughter, are here, as of old under the blue skies of Greece. Circumstances force

the individual into devious paths. The high gods are not all dead. They live in the human heart. Only we now make our own idols. We worship them as we will. And we must pay the price. And I—should *I* preach to my fellows? If I had the wisdom of Solon, could I live, even for one day, the life of another? We slave for money. What is money, when we leave it at the tomb? And yet, what is life without it?"

Old Seth, dropping the curtain, threw himself down and dreamed in his easy-chair of a sweet young face, long treasured in memory—a woman's face, hidden by the mists of long-buried years. And he murmured, as he closed his eyes, with a thought of the loved and lost, of his lonely life, and the vanished Paradise: "It might have been!"

While his eyelids dropped, far away, in Paris, the fair Witch of Harlem—gazing on her sparkling diamond circlet—thought fondly and kindly of the old man, and whispered:

"I will remember! For he spared me the only heartbreak the hostile Fates could now decree. John Martin's honest faith shall never be betrayed by me. May the Angel of Mercy seal the tomb of my dead past!"

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Dr. Andrew WILSON, F.R.S.E.,

Lecturer on Physiology and Health under the "Combe Trust;" Editor of "Health."

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